THREE TALES

FOR AN

IDLE HOUR

[Celia Ann Jones]

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BY THE

AUTHOR OF "THE SUNBEAM," "GERTRUDE DACRE,"
"HOW RACHAEL LEE FOUND THE CHRISTMAS GIFT,"
"TWO BAPTISMS," &c.

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TO

E. A., & F. DICKSON,

THESE TALES ARE DEDICATED

BY

THEIR VERY SINCERE FRIEND,

C. A. J.

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LIONEL HARCOURT.

CHAPTER I.

THE snow was on the ground, the bright clear stars shone in the wintry sky, shedding their soft, subdued light upon the white clad-earth, the chill north wind moaned and howled, and ever and anon through its dismal wail, sounds of joy, and mirth, and revelry fell on the ear, sweet village bells broke into glad chimes, and cheerful fires burned in homes to which warmth and light were ordinarily strangers; for it was Christmas Eve, a day which we have always regarded from our earliest childhood as almost as good as Christmas Day itself, a time for school prizes, and family gatherings, and blindman's buff, and snap-dragon, a season too which brings many a sad memory to those amongst us, who, think of the vacant chairs around the fire-side of home, of the loving words of greeting spoken by those whose voices are now hushed for ever in this world. Truly it is a mingled feeling of joy and sorrow which old Christmas brings us, but there is one joy which should be ever present

with us, one certainty of a blessing undeserved, but unspeakably precious which can never be taken from us, a joy and blessing which came to one and all of us 1866 years ago, which has lived with us ever since, leading the martyr to victory, teaching contentment to the poor, and charity to the rich, commanding us to show peace, and love, and goodwill on earth, for *His* sake through whom we hope for mercy in Heaven.

Christmas came to the inhabitants of the little village of Basselton with all the mingled feelings of which we have spoken. One or two fire sides there were, where all was mirth, and happiness, where no memory of the past intruded itself upon the present joy, where no shadow fell upon the yet untried path of the future; and in another home there reigned a sober, chastened thankfulness for the recovery of one from sickness nigh unto death, and voices of mourning and lamentation filled the house, where the widow sat with her fatherless children. Men and women as they passed, looked up at the closed blinds with sorrow and sympathy, for he who had been so suddenly taken from amongst them was one whom all had known and respected—the steward of Basselton Manor. The poor man's end had been so sudden that few knew that death had come amongst them and damped their Christmas joy, until amidst the

sweet glad music of the chimes, was heard the low deep tolling of the passing bell.

The solemn sound fell upon the ears of two people, sitting in the old oak panelled library of Basselton Manor. One, a tall, dark, stern-looking woman, the other a bright hair'd young man, with delicately chiselled features, saved from the charge of effeminacy which might otherwise have been inputed to them, by a hard almost defiant expression which played round the small mouth. A softer look came over his face, as he heard the warning sound, and he rose hastily and rang the bell.

An old grey headed servant answered the summons, "James who is it?" and the voice in which the question was asked was startling in its abruptness.

The old man hesitated, as though fearful of the effect of his words, then as Lionel Harcourt's eye rested upon him in a way, which he well knew meant that his young master would brook no delay, he answered in an awed whisper, "Please Sir, poor Mr. Morton's heart have took him off at last, he died an hour agone."

Then mother and son look at each other with something of what might have been fear, and mistrust expressed on both their faces. For a little time there was silence, then Lionel spoke.

"Mother, Morton was with you this afternoon, did

you say anything to him then, which may have brought on one of the old attacks, which has ended thus?"

A light as bright as that which shone in Lionel's eyes, flashed in Mrs. Harcourt's dark orbs as she answered:

"Nothing, I only told him that Lionel Harcourt was no meet bridegroom for his puny faced daughter."

"You told him that, did you, said Lionel, clenching his fist," you dared to tell an honest man that one who has some slur, (heavens knows for what reason) on his name, must not stoop so low as to woo his daughter; mother you shall answer for this; before the Christmas morning dawns upon us, I *will* know the story of my father's life; before I go into the world of men, and see the finger of scorn pointed at me, I *will*, and must know, why in the little world of a country village, I am looked upon as an object of compassion—Mother beware of how you tamper with what to me is dearest on earth:—my honour, and my love." As Lionel spoke these words there was a tender light in his eye, and it seemed as though the mother's hard stern features wore a soft irresolute expression. The weakness was but momentary, she turned out the moderator lamp which stood upon the table, and prepared to tell her tale. The flicker-

ing light of the roaring fire fell upon the pictures of Lionel's ancestors hanging round the room, from the proud cavalier whom Vandyke had immortalized to the bright joyous features of a youth, strangely like the young master of Basselton, in height and hair, and lineaments, the greatest difference lying in the proud determined glance of the one, and the weak yielding expression of the other. A carol telling of love and peace, fell strangely on the ear of mother and son, as they sat there with hard bitter thoughts in their minds. Once more there was silence, broken only by the low moaning of the wind amid the grand old trees of the park; then Mrs. Harcourt told her story, and Lionel listened; knowing that the words which he heard would in some way or another change the whole current of his life. A few hours later when the inhabitants of the little village woke to bright, kindly thoughts, and pleasant greetings, he, the wealthiest, and apparently the most to be envied of them all, stood in his mother's room. "Mother good-bye, it may be for ever, God bless you and forgive you."

The dark eyes brightened, and the pale cheek flushed, at the unwonted words and tones of kindness, and as Lionel waiting for no parting benediction from his mother hurried from the room, a wail long, low, and piteous as of Israel's King mourning for his son,

broke from the pent-up agony of that woman's heart. There was no softness in the cry, no tender feeling mixed up with the exceeding bitterness and desolation it expressed; it told of wretchedness which could know no cure, of misery which would not admit of resignation.

Lionel bent his steps to the house where his dead steward lay. He opened the door and stood on the threshold of the small simply furnished room where a group of little children clung to their elder sister, a tall fair girl of nineteen or twenty. The young man's gaze rested longest on *her*, as he waited there until she should perceive his presence, bending his lofty head, whilst the expression on his face was so fixed and resolute, that when at last his shadow fell upon the group, the poor little children looked up terrified, at seeing their dear Lionel so unlike his usual self. The elder sister rose and gently disengaged herself from their grasp. "Lionel," she said, and her hand was laid upon his arm. That touch which never before had failed to thrill through his every vein with a strange mysterious power, did not rouse him now. "Lionel" and she drew him gently in to the opposite room, "have you no pity for our grief?"

"Pity, yes, for you and, for myself."

She did not seem to heed his words,

"Lionel, I hope it is not wrong, but the thought of your love *has* been a comfort through all this dreadful time; *he* loved you so, Lionel.

He turned away from her as if not daring to trust himself to look into the sweet sad face. "Alice I am come to release you from your promise, to bid you never think of me again, but as of one most miserable, to whom all human love must be denied. I am going away for ever." He strained her to his heart in one long, yearning, passionate embrace, and suddenly as he had entered the house he left it.

Before him rose his home; the old grey towers standing out in the pale morning light, the smoke curling slowly from the many chimneys. He walked quickly onwards, until the scene faded from his view, and home and love, and hope were left behind him. And through all his misery he heard the merry bells ringing out their summons to the faithful, to come and give thanks for the great gift and blessing of Christmas-tide.

Later in the day Lionel Harcourt, paced the deck of the mail steamer, on its stormy passage between Dover and Calais, whilst the Captain wondered what could have induced that fine young gentleman to leave his home on such a day, to give up the delights of roast beef and plum pudding for such a passage as this. Family t'other side

sir," said he, making an attempt at conversation.

"No," answered Lionel gloomily.

"Outwitting the constable," soliloquized the worthy tar, "and yet he's a fine young chap to look at, but one can never judge by appearances."

CHAPTER II.

A year had passed away. Lionel Harcourt had wandered far and wide through sunny landscapes, and dark forests, and into grim university towns, and little picturesque villages, with but one end in view—to solve the mystery which hung over his life, to return home with no stain of dishonor upon his name, or never again to set foot upon English ground. None at Basselton knew aught of its young master; the stern grave mother was sterner, and graver than ever now, but there was no outward sign of grief for the son who had banished himself from his home.

Alice Morton sat in the old house in Church Street, a pale sad girl; the blue eyes ever looking for him, who had left her so strangely—for her lost, loved Lionel. From childhood he had been her idol; when as a tiny girl she had played under the trees in the old park, and the bright brave boy had comforted her so kindly, when she fell down and cut her knee, and had left his own companions, to twine a wreath of oak leaves, and place it in her hat. His holidays had been the great events of her life;

she had learnt to look for him as for something which *must* bring happiness. Only the day before her father died, had he confessed his love and asked her to be his wife. Her love for him had become a part of herself, she hardly thought it necessary to tell him how intensely his affection was returned; only the little hand was placed in his, and the trustful eyes were lifted to his face, and no words were needed to tell him the depth of her woman's devotion. He was to speak to her father the next day. "Mais l'homme propose, et Dieu dispose." The same room which a few hours before had been bright with love and happiness was now the scene of death. What the good steward's answer to Lionel's suit might have been, was a mystery which now could never be solved. He had loved and served his young master faithfully, but in his simple-heartedness he had never dreamed of him as a son-in-law until that afternoon, when the proud mistress of Basselton, taunted him with wishing to draw her son into a *mesalliance;* then words which he had never before spoken to a Harcourt fell from the father's lips; he walked home and staggered into the house, and the disease which for years had threatened his life carried him off then in the prime and vigour of his manhood.

The first anniversary of his death came to those who mourned him in all its sadness; there were other griefs

and cares pressing upon them which added to the burden of their sorrows, and as Alice looked out upon the dreary landscape and fixed her eyes upon the stately towers of Lionel's home, the events of that last sad Christmas-day came before her in all their vividness—Lionel's words were only half remembered, and wholly inexplicable, but the longing to be with him, to rest in his strong love, and pour her griefs and cares in his manly heart, seemed to come to her with a double intensity, as the world put forth its notes of Christmas joy. *Her* joy would be to be with him, to follow him to earth's remotest corner—apart from him all was a desert waste, with him, all would be love and joy and forgetfulness. Where was he now? she asked herself the question many times, and in mercy the answer was withheld from her, and her one solace on that Christmas morning was her trust in his unswerving fidelity.

The Christmas snow fell thick and fast in the town of Bonn; tiny bells tinkled cheerfully as hundreds of sledges ran merrily along the broad street which runs parallel with the Rhine. The noble river itself widening, as it approached the seven stately mountains, looked cold and still in the winter's light. A gleam of December sunshine lit up the "castl'd crag of Drachenfels" with a strange almost unearthly brightness, whilst the snow

which rested on the distant hills assumed a thousand varied shapes in the pale, changing light.

Lionel turned away from the bustle and excitement of the Coblenzer Strausse, and walked up and down the narrow path along the river's bank. He gazed upon the landscape absently, as though to him its grandeur and beauty were of no account. He had seen it all for many months, when sweet wild flowers bloomed upon the sunny slopes, and lovelier still when the autumn tints illumined the vine clad hills with a golden light. *Then*, hope still beat in his breast; with the winter's gloom it had died away, and left him sad, weary, and dispirited. A peasant woman with her snowy handkerchief over her head, on which she balanced a huge basket, tripped along as lightly as though she carried no such weight. "Guten tag mein Herr," she said; Lionel raised his hat and looked after her as she disappeared; perhaps envying her apparent freedom from care. Then came a gay group of students in their red and blue caps, and they too, greeted the solitary Englishman as they passed, for he was known as one who came and went at all odd times, although he seemed to repel all attempts at intimacy; they walked fast to catch the steamer, they were going up the Rhine, probably to spend the Christmas at their respective homes. Lionel envied *them* also, for no

words of friendly greeting would fall on his ear, no loving voice would speak to him kind Christmas wishes—none? What caused the warm blood to rush to his temples, as walking along the river's bank, he saw a group of ladies with the old English Chaplain. "The compliments of the season to you Mr. Walker," (Lionel had assumed this name since he had been abroad) said the cheery voice of the clergyman.

Lionel responded to the greeting, but his eye wandered to the girl who stood at the old man's side. It was a lovely face which met his earnest gaze, with dark flashing eyes, and hair black as the raven's wing, and a most bewitching smile playing round the small half opened mouth, displaying the perfect row of pearly teeth. The outlines of the tall slight figure were very graceful. The dark blue dress hanging in festoons above the bright red petticoat which was not too long to hide the tiny foot clad in its dainty chaussure. "Viel glück mein herr," she said laughingly as by tacit consent she and Lionel were left behind, whilst the rest of the party walked on.

The smile on his lips was one almost of scorn; "glück" he repeated "happiness, have I not told you before, that it is not for me?"

"Because you willingly trifle with it, and repel all sympathy, and all—"

He turned to her quickly, "sympathy for a man with a stain upon his name, would degenerate into pity; my spirit would hardly brook that."

"Pity for *you!*" and Kate Graham's eyes rested on Lionel's noble features, "you are above all pity, as you must be above all blame."

She did not know his story, she had met him during that summer and autumn at the various watering places, whither Mrs. Graham had conducted her daughters, in the vague hope that susceptible foreigners might fall victims to the beautiful Kate's charms, and kindly overlook her want of fortune. Her plan had met with some success, although not in the quarter she expected. The plain ordinary looking Nora had made a conquest of a Graf and was soon to attain to the dignity of a Grafinn, whilst her lovely sister had had Grafs and Hussars, and even Herzogs at her feet. and had laughed and talked and jested with them all in turn, but nothing more had come of it. The world said that Kate Graham had no heart, that she was a flirt, a coquette, in fact a most objectionable young person. The sequel of this sketch will show that Kate had a heart, choked up with a good deal of vanity and worldliness, but deep and true and self-sacrificing with it all. Such as it was, unsought, and unasked for it had been given to Lionel. He had been amused with her

quickness at first, charmed by her marvellous beauty, and somewhat flattered, it must be confessed, by her evident preference for his society, but neither in thought nor word had he ever been untrue to Alice, never until that Christmas afternoon when last year's wretchedness for her and for himself was freshest in his memory, when the longing to be with her had been strongest upon him, *there* with the cold waters of the Rhine flowing at his feet, and the gleam of sunshine on the distant hills, was Lionel guilty of his first infidelity.

"You are above all pity as you must be above all blame." The words came to him with a strange soothing power.

"Kate," he said, and it was the first time he had ever so addressed her, "if a man's father were convicted of a great crime; if upon a man's birth hung the stain of dishonor, what would you say to him then?"

She had never been less of a flirt than she was at that moment, when turning her eyes to his, she looked into his face with all truth and honesty.

"I should not care for his father, or for his birth, if I cared for himself."

Poor Alice, sitting in the dull old house at Basselton wishing for the gift of seeing, what he you loved might be doing at that particular moment, be thankful for your ignorance.

"Kate can you—do you really—"

"Walker, my good fellow, will you kindly help Mrs. Graham up the bank, you will be a better prop than I should be, and the young ladies are such expert climbers, they can take care of themselves." Lionel hastened forward at the Chaplain's words, and at the top of the hill which he had assisted Mrs. Graham to mount, stood that lady's house.

"I suppose we meet to night." she said. "Geheimrath von Arnim is expecting an English friend to stay with him, and I know he wishes us all to go."

"Yes I shall certainly be there, *au revoir*."

Kate watched his retreating figure, and then walked up to her own room. There were magnificent bouquets on the table, Christmas gifts from some of her many admirers; she tossed them scornfully on one side, but in the folds of her dress she hid a tiny violet which had been Lionel's gift.

"To-night," he must speak "to-night," she mused, I would bear the world's scorn all the days of my life, oh Lionel, if that life might be spent with you. And he too had nearly made up his mind that that night must decide his fate.

"So good, so true, so unlike all others, willing to bear and to give up all for my sake." Such were his meditations, he thought not then, of the pale quiet girl whom he had never asked to give up any-

thing, whom he had cast from him in the hour of his anger and of his pride, without one word of explanation of his strange conduct. And So with more than his usual care he dressed for the Geheimath's party, and more than usually handsome he looked as he entered the brilliantly lighted drawing-room.

Kate was already there, the centre of a group of hussars; for an instant their eyes met, but his gaze was speedily averted and fixed by some strange mysterious fascination upon the Professor's English guest.

He was a tall, prematurely old man, and must in his youth have been strikingly handsome, for the features were regular and classical in their outline even now, although deep furrows marked the sunken cheeks; and something about the mouth expressed indecision and irresolution in no common degree.

Lionel stood as if rooted to the spot, and was inexpressibly thankful to an old professor, who entered into a long and abstruse dissertation upon the science of air, and only required a good listener.

At length at a given signal the company moved into the next room, where a magnificent Christmas Tree stood to be admired. I doubt whether Lionel saw it, his eyes never wandered from the stranger's face. At length they stood side by side. The

light of the many tapers fell upon Lionel's bright hair, and brought out in bold relief the tall figure of the professor's guest. Kate Graham, from the opposite side of the room, gazed earnestly at them both. Then moved by some sudden impulse, she crossed the room.

"Mr. Walker, had you ever seen a Christmas tree before?"

Even then he did not turn to look at her, but he answered in a strange, hollow tone—"Years ago we had one for the school children in my home at Basselton."

The face of the old man wore a strange, wild look, as the words fell upon his ear. There was a heavy fall, a low moan, and he lay prostrate on the floor! Lionel knelt at his side, raising him with infinite tenderness, giving his orders in a clear, peremptory tone which none dared dispute, all giving him the right to act as the sufferer's fellow-countryman. Kate Graham had found out a secret that night; should she divulge it now, or bide her time! The time came sooner than she had anticipated. The still insensible form was laid on the bed in the best bed-room of the Geheimrath's house; the women fussed and bustled about; the few guests who had to wait for their carriages returned to the drawing-room, and talked in hushed-awed

whispers. Then the doctor arrived, approved of all that had been done, enjoined perfect quiet, and shook his head ominously.

Kate could bear no other society than her own thoughts. The night was intensely cold, but, heedless of all, she paced the broad terrace walk of the garden with restless, excited steps. She had staked her all upon Lionel's love, and there was no room in her heart for any other thought than for him. He was at her side before she knew of his approach.

"Miss Graham, is this prudent?" he asked.

"Prudent!" and there was infinite scorn in the tone. "How can I be prudent when I am wretched?"

Her vehemence startled him.

"Wretched," he said, "why?" He need not have asked the question, he felt it was for his sake, he knew she must have seen his agony, and the thought of her sympathy was very sweet in that hour of fierce trial.

"Kate," he said, "forgive me; I have found to-night what I have been seeking, for many long, weary months."

"I knew it," she said, "and I hoped the discovery might have brought happiness; it may still, if he gets better."

"You knew it? How?"

She turned upon him an eager glance, and muttered something about "the likeness."

"Then, if you saw it, others must have done the same."

"I do not think so, others probably do not know your face as I do."

She meant nothing by the admission, but he had noticed all her previous agitation, and then he spoke—

"Kate, I came here to-night resolved to lay my happiness at your feet, to ask you whether you could take me with the stain of a great dishonour upon my name, and help me to bury the memory of the past in a foreign land. I thought that with *you* I could forget all that makes my life miserable, but his appearance here has changed it all; my fate has come to me, and I must pursue it."

"Not alone, Lionel, you must let me help you."

"No," he answered sternly, all the softness which had been in his manner a moment before disappearing now; "I must suffer alone."

"Lionel, this is no time for scruples. Nothing on earth can alter my deep true love for you. Tell me what this mystery is; let me judge for myself if it really is an insurmountable obstacle to our happiness."

For an instant he stood irresolute, whilst the

dark eyes, flashing with passionate earnestness, were fixed upon his face.

Then he bent down and whispered something in her ear. Her cheek blanched, and she put her hand in his. "*You* are not guilty, Lionel; *that* can make no difference in my love for *you*."

Then, as the sound of voices was heard in the distance, the young man pressed his lips upon the girl's brow, and vowed in his inmost heart that such love and bravery as this deserved the devotion of a life-time.

A few more days of anxious watching, and then the English stranger was laid to his rest in the Friedhof: the court of peace. God grant that peace may have been his portion at last, for sad and weary had been the days of his life.

Lionel had sat by his side hour after hour, watching for some faint gleam of consciousness; but there was none; he died, and made no sign.

On the evening of the funeral Lionel once more sought Kate.

"I have another search to institute," he said; "it cannot be a long one; it is but for the grave of one who was nought to me, but who was most deeply wronged; and then I will come back and claim you, Kate."

There was no passion nor earnestness in his voice

The flame had burnt fiercely for a little time, but was extinguished now; honour and gratitude bound him to her, but such love as she dreamt of was not there. Perhaps she had not noticed the coldness of his words, or had accounted for them by thinking how he had suffered; for her voice trembled with emotion, and her words were passionate enough as she answered—

"Anywhere with you, you will be my home, and country, my all."

He could but draw her more closely to his side, and imprint a kiss upon her smooth white brow; but in an instant he stood aloof—

"My train starts at nine, I shall barely catch it. God bless you, Kate, and reward you for all."

"So soon," she murmured; "must you go so soon?"

"Yes, but it will not be for long; I will write and tell you when I am coming back."

CHAPTER III.

THE winter's gloom brightened into sweet spring-tide, and still Kate waited for Lionel's return, but he came not; and weary waiting, and hope deferred, had changed the bright high-spirited girl into a pale, sad maiden.

She sat in the May sunshine, one bright afternoon, gazing listlessly into the sparkling waters of the glorious Rhine, not heeding Mrs. Graham's and Nora's animated conversation respecting the arrangements for the wedding which was to take place the following week. At last, Nora went into the house, and Mrs. Graham pored over the columns of the *Times*.

"Basselton," she said at last, "who lives there, Kate; the name seems familiar to me."

Kate's face was no long inanimate; the flush of excitement burnt on the pale cheek as she seized the paper from her mother's hand, and read the words for herself.

"If L. H., who left his home on Christmas-day, 185—, will return to Basselton, there have been papers discovered, which may make all clear. Alice."

"Mamma, when Nora is married, we will go back to England at once."

Mrs. Graham took off her spectacles, and looked wonderingly at her daughter.

"My dear, you are very odd; I have so often wished for this very thing, and you have always negatived it."

"But now *I* wish it."

This was enough—it had never entered into the Graham philosophy to refuse Kate anything; so those few words settled the point.

Mrs. Graham followed Nora into the house to communicate to her this new freak of Kate's, and the girl was left to dream upon the meaning of what she had read, to wonder who could be the owner of that simple name, Alice. For Kate never for an instant doubted that Lionel Harcourt was the L. H. of the advertisement. To her, and to her alone, he had confided his real name; he had talked to her of Basselton only once, and that once had been when he accidentally said he had left his home on Christmas-day.

How dared this Alice address *him, her Lionel?* Hers! Oh, by how frail a tenure! Once only in all those months had he written her a few hurried matter-of-fact lines, telling her of disappointment and uncertainty, but promising a speedy return.

Days and weeks passed on, and he came not; and the passionate longing to see him once again grew stronger in Kate's heart. She *must* look upon that face once more, listen again to the deep tones of the manly voice, even though it were to hear him say what she so dreaded: that he had ceased to love her.

Had he ever loved her? Those months of reflection had opened her eyes to the bitter truth, had brought with them the humiliating conviction, that honour and gratitude alone had brought him to her feet. To go to the place where he had lived—to solve the mystery which hung over his life—to see this Alice—now became the one dream of her existence.

A week afterwards, when the Graf and Gräfinn drove off to their chateau after a long wearisome wedding breakfast, where speeches had been made not one word of which Mrs. Graham could understand, and would have given all the world poor woman, to tire to her couch and enjoy a comfortable afternoon's nap, the merciless Kate insisted that they must start for England at once. The dresses that had been worn at the wedding were laid at the top of the already well filled trunks, and mother and daughter bade adieu to the bright smiling Rhineland.

"Where shall we go when we arrive my dear?" said Mrs. Graham helplessly, as they sat in the train on their way to Cologne. "You know your Uncle Tom is out of London, and really I am puzzled where to go."

Kate drew a *Bradshaw* out of her capacious travelling bag.

"See, Mamma dear," she said, "Tiverton is gaining considerable repute as a watering place, the springs are supposed to be particularly efficacious in cases of gout; (Mrs. Graham had suffered from incipient symptoms of that malady), what do you say to trying it?"

"Well my dear I see no objection" (Kate had never anticipated any) "How far is it from Town?"

"Two hours by train. This is the line, read for yourself Mamma."

Mrs. Graham conned over the page, "London, Steronby, Basensdale, Basselton, Tiverton."

"Basselton, there's that name again and I never can remember where I have heard it; who lives there, Kate?"

Kate's cheek blushed as she answered. "I don't know any one who lives there now, but I think, indeed I am sure that it was Li—— Mr. Walker's home once."

Mrs. Graham looked at her daughter enquiringly,

She was by no means of an observant disposition, but the trembling tones, and quivering lip, told of no common emotion; and for once the mother's perceptions were awakened.

"My child" she said, "you would not seek him out?

"Yes mother I would. I think I would follow him to the world's end to hear him say that he once loved me, that it was not all a dream and a delusion of my own. Then I think I could die in peace, for I should feel that I had not thrown away all that a woman ought to hold most dear and precious."

"Well my dear, I am sure I don't understand young ladies of the present day. Before I married your poor father I was engaged to an officer, who went away and left off writing to me, and treated me in fact just as this Mr. Walker has treated you. I am sure I liked him at the time, but my pride came to my rescue and I soon forgot him. You should do the same Kate; indeed it is unmaidenly of you to think of this man still."

Kate took refuge in silence, and Mrs. Graham slumbered profoundly during the remainder of the short journey to Cologne. There the travellers slept and the next morning took the steamer to Rotterdam. Two more days, and once more they stood on English ground; a few short hours and in the stillness

of the bright June evening, the train stopped at Basselton station. Kate gazed eagerly out of the carriage window. There was a quiet village street, and an old ivy covered church standing on a hill above the red bricked houses, and far back, seen between the grey tower and the dark trees which stood in the churchyard, was a time-worn, noble-looking mansion. The rays of the departing sun fell upon the quaint gable ends, and threw out in strange fantastic forms the red tiled roof. It was but a momentary glimpse that Kate Graham canght of Basselton Manor, but a strange feeling came into her heart; a conviction that somehow or other there existed some connection between that grand old dwelling and Lionel Harcourt's history.

A month before that advertisement appeared in the columns of the *Times*, Alice Morton sat in the old house in Church street. The late steward's dwelling looked more desolate than ever now, whilst a bill in the window announced that it was to be sold or let; but somehow no one seemed to fancy it as a residence; for more than a year that notice had been read there. Alice had thought that the new steward might have taken the house. But he was a *genteel* young man with enlarged ideas, and the notion of residing in the one street of a country village would have been too much for his nerves; so he established

himself in Arcadia Villa, a suburban dwelling on the Tiverton Road, and Alice and her mother, and the children lived, on in their old home.

Now, Alice and the children were there alone; and in the quiet churchyard where the good husband and father slept, there was another grave, another inscription on the marble cross telling of the death of Alice, widow of John Morton, and bearing the inscription "Blessed are the meek."

Alice's past life seemed a very long way off now. Like a bright dream were the fond caresses of her father and mother, the gentle words, the protecting care, which had shed their influence over her for so many years. How much more unreal even than all this was the dim delicious memory of Lionel's spoken love.

None of this was her's now, Alice wondered at herself, wondered that she; poor gentle, timid, little Alice as she had always been called, had been able to endure such an accumulation of misery as had fallen upon her; aye, and endured it bravely too, had taken such care of the children, and thought of all that her father and mother would have wished her to do.

Poor weary child! It was no earthly strength which had been given her. The God of the fatherless had been with her, through all that fierce trial

and out of it the timid, gentle girl had come forth purified and ennobled, with all the old meekness and humility about her still, but with a firm holy resolve in her mind to bear all the trials of the world with all patience, looking ever onward to the calm, peaceful home where her treasures were, and where if she would follow them her heart must also be.

The remembrance of Lionel was her greatest sorrow, for she could not think of *him* at rest; he was ever before her with that hopeless despairing expression on his face, as when he had looked upon her in the first bitterness of her great sorrow.

What she had dreaded for months had come to pass now. An old maiden Aunt had offered to put the boys to school and take charge of the two younger girls, whilst Alice was to seek her fortune as a governess. She was very busy making arrangements for the grand move and sorting her father's old papers.

Reginald, the youngest brother stood near her; a noble looking little fellow of some six years of age. He was Alice's especial pride and darling, to part with him would be the one overflowing drop in her cup of bitterness.

A l-i-k-e-n-e-s-s o-f M-r-s. H-a-r-c-o-u-r-t a-n-d h-e-r i-n-f-a-n-t s-o-n L-i-o-n-e-l, spelt Reggie *proudly from* a distant corner, whither he had retired.

Aliced turned round quickly, and the child approached her.

"See Ally I found this on the floor near the drawer, tied up with a letter. It is such a pretty lady, not a bit like Juno; (such was the term which Reginald's school-boy brothers generally applied to Mrs. Harcourt). And the little fellow held up the portrait to his sister."

Alice took it from him and gazed at it long and earnestly. It was an exquisitely painted miniature of a mother and her child. The baby was like all other babies who are ever delineated upon ivory, fair, fat and good tempered looking, but Alice had never before gazed upon anything as lovely as the mother. The golden hair, the violet eyes, and exquisitely clear bright complexion stood out before her as a beautiful vision; she looked again, and unconsciousiy the tears rose to her eyes, for the sweet face told of sorrow and sickness, and the artist had given to the deep blue eyes a yearning wistful expression, as if they would feign fathom some hitherto unknown mystery.

A strange new light shone on Alice's pale sad face, as she sat as one in a dream looking at the features which seemed in some way to be familiar to her.

In those few moments she guessed at something of

the secret of Lionel Harcourt's life. Reggie was dismissed in a more summary manner than that to which he was accustomed, and then Alice searched for the paper from which he had taken that most precious picture; she read the address, and even then the light shone out more clearly. "To be given to my son Lionel when the news of my death shall reach England, but in no case until he shall have attained his twenty-fifth year; and there was what appeared to be a closely written letter, enclosed in a blank envelope.

Alice went to her desk, and sealed up the packet, and then she sat for hours in the room where the discovery had been made, which in some unaccountable manner, might, she felt, save Lionel from shame and disgrace. The stars of the summer night shone in the sky, the moon rose in the cloudless heavens, and still Alice sat there in her loneliness and bewilderment. "After my death," she repeated "how strangely it has all come about."

For in those dull winter months there had fallen a yet deeper shadow upon Basselton Manor, and its stern mistress had appeared at Basselton Church, clad in the sober garments of widowhood. One short paragraph in the *Times* told the world where and when Mr. Harcourt had died, and then the question arose: where was the heir? No one knew. Not

even that tall, dark woman, whom that bright-haired young man called mother.

Strange stories were told of an unquiet spirit which wandered up and down the terrace at Basselton Manor when the moon shone in the heavens, but which shunned the warm sunshine and the light of day; but after a while even these tales were forgotten, and the old house and its stern mistress ceased to be subjects of discussion.

On the night that Reggie found that picture, as Mrs. Harcourt knelt in her room, and asked forgiveness for the many faults of a most sinful life, Alice concocted the advertisement which had hitherto had no other result than bringing Kate Graham to Tiverton.

The next day, the late steward's daughter astonished her friends by the unwonted fact of asserting her own will, and firmly refusing to leave Basselton for the next six months.

CHAPTER IV.

A PIC-NIC party was gathered under the old elms of Basselton Park. A bright sunshiny day it was, a day made for the joyous children who sported so merrily beneath the shade of the spreading trees. A fair girl and a little servant-maid were busily employed in unpacking a hamper which had been conveyed to its destination in a donkey-cart. It was Reginald Morton's birthday, and Alice had planned this little treat for him, thinking it might be many a long year ere she would spend that anniversary with her pet youngest brother. There was a summons to the little ones when all was ready, and they sat down cheerfully to the feast which Alice had prepared.

The five little brothers and sisters, and three friends, Reggie's especial favourites, who had been invited to do him honour on his birthday.

"My eyes, what a pie!" said Johnnie. "Did you make it, Ally? Are the pigeons real?"

"No, stuffed, Jack," answered the elder sister in a clear, sweet voice; "will you try one?"

But Jack did not answer, and Reggie pulled Alice's dress, and drew closer to her side. "See, Ally," he said, "a lady."

The joyous young voices were hushed in an instant, and the bright eyes looked askance at a young lady who stood amongst them as an intruder, probably as Johnnie announced to his next door neighbour, "with an eye to the pigeon pie."

It was a lovely face which met Alice's blushing, inquiring gaze, and the stranger's voice was very sweet as she said,

"I have lost my way; I walked from Tiverton. Can you tell me how I can get home again?"

"From Tiverton? how tired you must be; will you not sit down and rest a little, and when the children have had their dinner, I will put you into the way of a short cut through the fields."

"Thank you, I am afraid I have no time to spare. If ——"

"Alice," shouted one of the children.

A strange expression came over the intruder's face—

"Well, on second thoughts, if you will let me have a glass of water, I think I had better accept your kind offer."

"That's a dodge to get pigeon pie," muttered Johnnie.

The stranger sat at Alice's side, winning all the children's hearts (even Johnnie's) by her bright kind manner, and obstinate refusal of pigeon pie.

At last, the feast was over, and Alice, leaving the children to the care of the little maid, with strict injunctions to them all not to go nearer the house, accompanied her new acquaintance on her way.

"Does the proprietor of this place live here?" asked the stranger.

"Yes—no—I don't know," was Alice's lucid reply.

"Then you are not a resident in Basselton?"

"I have lived here all my life." Then seeing how very stupid she must appear, Alice roused herself and said, "The old master died last Christmas, and the young one is away."

"Will he soon come back?"

Alice felt that the lustrous eyes were fixed steadily upon her as she answered—

"I do not know; no one knows. This is the turning; you must keep to your right until you see the spire of Tiverton Church."

"Thank you; if you ever walk as far as Tiverton, will you come and see me? My name is Kate Graham; I am living there with my mother at a place called Rose Cottage. We know no one, and I am very lonely; it would be a real charity if you *would take pity* upon me."

"Thank you; if I have time I will come. But we are not going to stay here always; we are soon to leave Basselton."

"Then, where will you go?"

"The children are to be sent to my aunt's at Bath, and I am going to be a—a governess; since papa and mamma died we have been very poor."

There was infinite compassion in Kate Graham's voice, as she laid her hand tenderly upon the fair girl's shoulder and said—

"My poor child, it would be a hard heart indeed that could inflict any additional trouble upon you."

"Every one has always been very kind to me," answered Alice wonderingly, looking up at the handsome face, which was bent with such strange pity on her's.

"And *I* will be kind too, so help me God," said Kate Graham.

Alice was startled at the vehemence of the stranger's tone.

"Thank you," she said as quietly as she could; "I am sure you will;" and then she turned away and walked slowly back to the spot where she had left the children.

Kate watched her until she was out of sight.

"Once more, Lionel," she murmured; "only once again, and then I will give you up for ever. I

have a home and friends, and that poor child seems to have no one to save her from wretchedness and dependence."

It was no light resolve she made then, no common agony she endured in the fearful struggle which followed; but all the best feelings of a nature which had in it much that was true and noble were roused at the sight of that fair, lonely girl, whom something told her she had most unintentionally wronged. The wrong was repaired; at what a cost none but One who seeth in secret ever knew.

CHAPTER V.

Two months later, and in the gloom of the lengthening October evening Alice, sat in her old home, watching and waiting, as Kate Graham had done before, for Lionel's return. The postman's knock sounded through the house, and the boys rushed in from school, Johnnie holding a letter in his hand.

"You'll be happy now, Ally; it's from Tiverton."

She took the missive from the boy's hand, and read it quickly.

"Darling Ally," it began, "come with all the children and spend a long day with us to-morrow; mamma says she will allow of no refusal. Ever yours, Kate."

The little note will speak for itself as to the advances in friendship made by the two girls during the comparatively short period since Reggie's birthday pic-nic. And yet they were neither of them gushing young creatures, ready to pour out their confidences into the ear of any friend, male or female, who would listen to them. Kate, indeed,

always repudiated young ladies' friendships, but this was different, she said to herself. That sorrowful, trusting face, which had seemed to plead for love and kindness, had taken her heart by storm; somehow she felt she must shield her from harm, even though she might be preserving the fair drooping flower, to bloom in all its sweetness in Lionel's home.

They had met very often during the bright summer days, and yet the subject nearest to the hearts of both had never been spoken of between them.

The days passed on, the time of Alice's departure was drawing very near, and still they waited on with a common hope, although one of them was ignorant that it was so.

Alice communicated the contents of Kate's note to the boys, adding, "but I don't think it will do, dears; you have had so many holidays lately."

"But, Ally, we shan't have many more together," and the brothers' voices quivered as they spoke.

So she wrote a hearty acceptance of Kate Graham's invitation, and the boys sat down to the mysteries of Euclid.

A horse galloped furiously down the street, and stopped at Dr. Bartlett's house, which was next to the Morton's.

"I say, there's something up," and the ever active

Johnnie vaulted across a table and two chairs, and was at the hall door in an instant. He came back with an awed, startled face.

"Alice, Mrs. Harcourt is dead, and Lionel has come home."

She could not answer; she dared not trust herself to ask any questions; she kissed her young brothers, and prayed God to bless them, as she had done every night since their mother died, and then she went to her own room to try and realise the meaning of Johnnie's words—"Lionel come home!" The restless longing was satisfied at last, and yet Alice felt that she would willingly go back to yesterday, with its vague uncertainty, rather than know that to-morrow might bring the positive corroboration of all her miserable doubts of Lionel's love. That letter and likeness, upon which she felt her fate in some way depended, had been sent to Lionel's London lawyer, and must, she knew, have been read and seen by him ere he had returned to Basselton. Then she remembered with shame that she had forgotten in her selfishness that Mrs. Harcourt was dead. Coupled as those words of Johnnie's had been with the news of Lionel's return, they had fallen almost unheeded on her ear; now as in the still night air the knell sounded clear and distinct, the girl fell on her knees at the side

of her little bed, praying with all earnestness and intensity for her who was gone. She was no Romanist, believing in the efficacy of prayers for the dead, but it seemed as though even then she must ask for mercy for one who, during all the years of her life, had shewn no mercy to herself or to others—for one who in her heart Alice knew to be a miserable sinner. But there is One above who is most merciful, and there are none below sinless enough to cast the first stone.

It was quite true—Lionel had reached his home on that afternoon, with no such hard feelings in his heart as those with which he had left it—prepared to be merciful, where before he had been stern and unrelenting—resolved that that interview with Mrs. Harcourt must be a final one—that ere another sun set upon Basselton Manor that dark-eyed woman must have sought another home, where she should have the comforts of her own, but where he and she should never meet again.

The old butler had ushered him into the room where Mrs. Harcourt sat, and it seemed as though something in the expression of Lionel's face impelled him to stand and watch the meeting.

"Lionel, my son!"

He bent his lofty head by way of greeting, and said in a tone struggling for calmness—

"A letter from my father has come into my possession—I know all; and I have come home—where I never thought I should come again."

A change came over the dark face—such a change as Lionel had seen on the handsome features of the professor's English guest, on that Christmas night at Bonn. Old James rushed forward to see Lionel receive the drooping form into his arms, whilst the pale face was lighted up with a strange unearthly beauty, and the dark eyes were turned with an intensity of supplication towards him for whom she had so watched and waited—

"Lionel, for His sake who forgave us and died for us, forgive and pity me."

"Even as I hope to be forgiven."

There was a smile on the weary suffering face as Lionel uttered the words, and, with something even of tenderness in his manner, stooped to kiss the brow—*which was the brow of the dead.*

A few hours later, awed and sorrowful, the master of Basselton Manor sat alone in the room where we first saw him—reading for the twentieth time that packet which Alice had found, and which had awaited his arrival in London, gazing with an expression of the deepest tenderness at the fair portrayal of his young mother's features.

There was an ending to his father's somewhat hurried, unfinished MS.

A few words found on Mrs. Harcourt's person after her death, which Lionel seemed never tired of reading and wondering over. But we must go back to the Christmas night, when our story opens, and hear the words which had fallen from the strange, dark woman's lips, which had sent Lionel homeless and miserable to seek his fate.

He had upbraided her with her harsh treatment of his dead steward, and she, in her unbridled anger, had resolved to have her revenge.

"Lionel, you ask me of your father; you know he was twice married; do you know how his first wife died?"

"No," answered the young man, a strange undefinable sense of something too dreadful for words coming over him.

"Then hear it now: it was by her husband's hand—by poison. *I* alone know the secret."

Great drops of agony stood on the son's brow.

"Mother, in pity tell me how long ago was this?"

In her excitement she almost outwitted herself.

"Twenty-four years ago, Lionel, this very night—it happened on Christmas-eve. *I*—"

Lionel was standing before her, a look of proud, sullen determination on his face.

"Four-and-twenty years ago, and I am not yet twenty-three. Finish your story; tell me the double stain upon my name."

She saw *her* mistake and *his* suspicions, and overwhelmed with confusion at the one, she determined to turn the other to account—she did not answer. He misinterpreted her silence, and from his lips fell a torrent of rebukes, words of bitter irony which she bore without attempting either contradiction or excuse.

When he had stood in her room in the dawn of the Christmas morning, softer feelings were in her heart—his words of blessing and forgiveness had brought her to a knowledge of the deep wrong she was inflicting upon him—but it was too late then for reparation. She had borne the burden of her guilt and misery all through those long weary, months—her tears had been her meat day and night—there had been no peace for the stern woman whom the world thought so hard and cold. She knelt, her servants said, for hours during the cold winter's day, seemingly impervious to all. Sometimes after the news had come of her husband's death, they used to hear the words, which seemed to come from the depths of a broken, contrite heart—"O! Lord in mercy bring him back; let me hear him say he forgives me; then let me die, and do Thou forgive one most *sinful.*"

The first part of that oft repeated prayer had been answered. Who shall deny that He who is most merciful did not grant the last petition—did not accord to one who confessed herself most sinful, His pardoning grace? Let him who is without sin amongst us, withhold from her that hope of mercy.

CHAPTER VI.

"READ the story of my life, Lionel, my son," so ran Mr. Harcourt's manuscript, "and learn from it to flee from temptation. My childhood, and youth, and early manhood, were happier than I think falls to the lot of most people. I married when I was one and twenty, the brightest, loveliest being that ever walked God's earth. We were happy—but the serpent entered Eden, and our paradise was not to be exempt from the common lot. There was hardly a drawback to our bliss, except it might be that we had no child.

"In my bachelor life I had contracted an acquaintance—a friendship, perhaps I ought to call it—for a woman some years my senior—beautiful as an Eastern Princess, passionate and wilful as one of them might be. She was poor and friendless, but none ever dared cast a slur upon her honour or her virtue. I admired her, but nothing more—she, (beardless boy though I was,) possessed by some strange infatuation, loved me—but I was not aware of it. I talked of her to my gentle Edith, and she

came to stay with us at Basselton—then peace was no longer ours. Lionel, neither by thought, word, nor deed was I ever untrue to your mother, but I learnt to fear that proud dark woman, and in time I learnt to know no will of my own. Edith pined away, the bright colour forsook her cheek, and they said she would die. There was but one hope, the doctor told me, the air of a softer clime. I remember how her sweet face brightened as she heard the words, and one of the old happy looks lit up the wan, weary features. We did not go abroad alone—*she* came with us, watching and tending the invalid with extraordinary devotion, but the evil shadow was there still. At length what once would have perfected our happiness was granted to us—*you* were born, my Lionel, and for months there was contentment if not happiness. But it was only the calm which preceeds a storm; my doom was nearer than I imagined. I remember all the incidents of the day, which was the last which ever bore for me a semblance of happiness. It was Christmas time—warm, bright and genial beneath the sunny skies of Italy. There was some dispute with the nurse, and I to my shame sided with *her* and with the woman, against your mother. Angry words passed between us, then in her gentleness Edith drew me to her side and asked me to forgive her, telling me for the first time of all

her love, and fears, and jealousy. It seemed to me like the dawning of a brighter day, and with these thoughts in my mind and the firm determination to keep my promise and send away the destroyer of our home joy, I leant my head upon your mother's couch and watched her into a gentle happy sleep. I think I slept too. When she awoke it was to ask me for a draught the doctor had prescribed for her. I gave it. I know no more, except that they told me afterwards she was dead, and that I had killed her. There was a bottle labelled poison, there were my angry words brought up against me—all pointed at me as the murderer of one I loved better than my life. When I came to myself after the fearful, crushing blow which had fallen on me, I found myself far away from the scene of my misery. They told me that I had had brain fever, that I owed my life to my nurse. I believe I was mad still. I married her, and for six years we wandered from place to place, seeking for the rest and peace which never again was to be ours. Once only Mrs. Harcourt spoke to me of the past, and that was to ask that the child might pass as her's whenever we returned to England; making my acceptance of her conditions the seal of her silence. I complied with her request—as I did with all she asked. I observed at the same time that the birth must have appeared in the news-

papers, and that the truth must be known; but she told me that the fact of your birth had never in any way transpired, through some stupid mistake in the Italian post. God only knows whether there she spoke the truth, or whether she had in any way intercepted the letters I had written at the time. Conjecture is of no avail now. I am in her power and cannot throw off my yoke.

"Once more we came to England and to Basselton. But my lost Edith's memory haunts every nook and corner of the old place, and I cannot stay here. She says she loves me. God knows she need. I must leave her, and you, my only boy. I have seen you in your little cot to-night, looking so like *her*. The people in the village have noticed the likeness, but then they always said my Edith and me favoured each other very much, and no suspicions are aroused. She says she will be kind to you. Lionel, be a better man than your father has been—not so weak and purposeless, and vacillating. You will not see this until I am dead, or at least until you are old enough to know how to act. Strength is failing me, not physical but mental power. Lionel, I swear before God that I am innocent of all but folly and weakness. Show mercy to *her*, for His sake who shows mercy to all of us."

Then from the pale faded characters which had

been traced by Lionel's father more than eighteen years ago, the son turned to the bold, clear handwriting of her who had wrought such misery for them both.

"Lionel when you read this, God only knows where I may be; but you and I can never dwell under the same roof. You will loathe me when you hear it all. Remember it has been suffered for, and repented of, and still (most horrible thought!) has to be punished, it may be in endless, never-dying torment. I loved your father, not with the calm affection of the girl he called his wife—but with the passionate devotion which few women have it in their power to give, but which was my inheritance, and perhaps my curse. He did not care for me, and in my madness and my jealousy I resolved that though he *did* not love me, he *should* fear me.

"In time he did, and so did the pale, gentle girl who, with all my wickedness, I *could not* hate. You were born, and I loved *you*—it was the one pure holy feeling left me. I seemed to be a better woman when I held you in my arms. I saw that I was marring the peace of both your father and mother, and one day a letter arived advising my presence in England. I made up my mind to leave them to their joy, for somehow a gleam of a new happiness *had* come with you. I went to your mother's room to tell her of

my decision, and then some harsh words passed between your nurse and myself. Your father took my part in the discussion, and I left my tale untold, and retired triumphant. Later in the afternoon I heard a conversation between the husband and wife. It told of happiness and total reconciliation, all to be based upon one condition, *I* was to be sent away. There was no softness left in my nature when I heard the words. I was mad, infuriated, beside myself. An hour later I returned to the room, *her* head rested on *his* breast—they were both asleep—it seemed as if their dreams must have been very sweet. It was the hour at which she always took her composing draught. I placed the bottle near her—not the right one, *one* labelled *poison*. Lionel, it *was* premeditated; two minutes afterwards I would have given worlds to undo the dreadful deed. It was *too* late—she had awoke and asked for her draught, and *he* had given it to her. I accused him of being her murderer, and for three months he was a raving maniac. At the end of the time he woke to consciousness; the one horrible thought was ever before him.

"He married me out of fear—he had never loved me, he almost hated me then; I think he loathed me afterwards. He was in my power, and he dared not rebel, but when six years afterwards we returned to

England, he could not brook it longer, he could not see me installed at Basselton in *her* place.

"One dark October night he left his home, telling me he should go somewhere to Germany, but that henceforward we must be strangers to each other. I heard of him at intervals through his lawyer. To-day the news of his death has reached me. He is gone—the only man I ever loved, he for whom I have perilled the salvation of my soul.

"Come home, Lionel, and hear the truth; hear that all I in my anger told you that Christmas night was a delusion and a lie—hear that you are no murderer's son, no base born child. Need I say more? I have loved you as a mother would have doted on her first born, but I never could gain your affection, and my life has been joyless and miserable, and there is no hope in my death.

"Basselton, January 4th, 185—"

So the confession ended, and Lionel could not judge one who was already gone to her last account. The softer memories of his youth came over him as he remembered the many acts of kindness rendered him by the woman who to all else had been so harsh and stern. To find that all the want of sympathy was accounted for, was in itself a relief. The thought that she had taken away the life of one,

who might have been to him what other mothers were to other sons, came across him for an instant, but instinctively he felt that she had only shortened those days of suffering, for in those last few months he had heard of his mother, and all who had known her spoke of her as one who had been gradually fading from their eyes—and the end had been happy, perhaps the re-awakening from that peaceful slumber might have brought back some of the old cares and worries, which had shortened the bright young life.

So Lionel stood in the still calm presence of the woman who had cast such a shadow on the lives of those with whom she had come in contact, with but one wish in his heart, a prayer that the forgiveness granted her above might be as full and entire as that which he accorded to her.

CHAPTER VII.

"A LADY, if you please, sir; she will take no denial."

Lionel did not lift his eyes from the book he was reading, as he answered,

"Tell her I can see no one just now."

"She told me to give you this, sir;" and the man handed a little pencil note to his master.

"For both our sakes, spare me a few minutes' conversation. Kate Graham."

"Let her in, James."

Lionel's cheek was very white, and his whole frame trembled as he rose to receive this most unexpected visitor.

Kate's voice was firm enough as she spoke, but it needed no one very well skilled in reading the human countenance to tell how she had suffered.

"Lionel, I have come to release you from our engagement."

Perhaps there was still some latent weakness in the brave girl's passionate nature, perhaps there was a lingering hope that the mistake did not rest with her, but with Alice. All was dispelled in a

moment, as she looked up into his face, and saw the expression of intense relief with which he hailed her words.

"Miss Graham—Kate! why *is* this?"

"For many reasons—first and foremost of all, I have made a new friend since we parted—her name is Alice Morton; for her sake, Lionel, I give you back your promise—it was a mistake from the beginning; we will think of it no more."

"And yet, Kate, you were faithful and true when there was dishonour on my name, and I loved you then. God knows, you brightened my solitary life."

She had prayed to hear him say those words, and now she was satisfied.

"Then there is no stain on your name now? I thought all would be right."

For answer he placed those letters before her, and she read them to the end, and then, as if not daring to trust herself to speak, she rose from her seat.

"Where are you going, Kate?"

"To Tiverton; we have been living there for the last few months."

"Shall you stay there always?"

"No," and the clear voice faltered with emotion. "Mamma does not like England, she is going to Germany to live with Nora."

"And you will go with her?"

"No; my plans are somewhat uncertain."

Lionel stepped forward eagerly and took her hand in his.

"Kate, when Alice is my wife, you will have a home with us."

Instinctively her glance fell on the letters which were lying on the table, and a change came over her face—perhaps she thought of the dark stranger who had stolen away the happiness of Lionel's lovely mother.

There was a sharp struggle for an instant—to be with Alice, to see Lionel, the world seemed now to hold out no brighter prospect. Then she answered calmly and resolutely,

"God grant, Lionel, that all earthly happiness may be hers and yours, but henceforward our paths in life must diverge. Tell Alice all, only withhold my name;" and with these words she passed from the room.

That evening, with his arm round Alice's waist, Lionel told his tale, and Alice, in her evening prayers, asked for a blessing on one who had been kind to Lionel in his sorrow, and who had lost the unutterable blessing of *her* Lionel's love.

Then she offered up her usual petition for the warm-hearted, generous girl, who had brightened the last desolate months of her lonely life.

"My own Kate," she murmured, "you must hear of my happiness to-morrow."

Early the next morning Alice walked over to Tiverton, and found that Mrs. Graham and her daughter had gone to London. There was a note for Alice—a tender, loving farewell, but no promise of a future meeting. Alice in her happiness did not notice the omission, but Lionel read the words, and understood the mournful tone running through them, knew that the deep love which had been his would never be extinguished this side of the grave.

Five years later, and little lisping voices spoke their Christmas greetings in the old hall of Basselton Manor, and eager faces thronged round a box just come from London, which papa and mamma were inspecting, and which contained most wonderful presents from a certain unknown Aunt Kate, who always sent down these Christmas gifts to Lionel's and Alice's children, not forgetting the young uncles and aunts.

"I wonder why Aunt Kate is so kind; why she loves you so much," said Alice to her eldest boy, as he displayed his prize.

The boy did not heed the mother's question, but turned to his father.

"If she loves us so much, papa, why does she not come to see us?"

There was a strange expression on Lionel's face. The child's remark brought back that Christmas night at Bonn seven years before.

Alice looked at her husband wonderingly, then she went up to him, and put her hand in his. "Lionel, I have so often wondered who the heroine of that story was, which you told me that first evening after you came home, may I hear her name now?"

"Yes," he answered, as he drew her more closely to his side, "it has been the only secret between us; Kate Graham it was who made me waver in my allegiance to you."

"I thought so, it has been in my mind for a long time—poor Kate;" and Lionel could not forbear a smile at the young wife's compassion for her rival.

"Then it is not such a hard lot, Alice?" he said.

"Hard! O Lionel! I did not think that life could be so happy, and so free from care."

That same Christmas night, in the wards of a London Hospital, lay a dying child. There was a hectic flush on her cheek, her voice was low and husky, and pain and weariness were written on the young face.

Suddenly her eye brightened, and a glance of

pleasure lit up the wasted features. A lady clad in a dress now recognized as belonging to our own Church—an English Sister of Charity drew near to the bed.

The tones of the voice were strangely sweet, the manner peculiarly gentle in which the visitor spoke.

"Is the pain so bad to-night, dear child."

"Yes, ma'am, it's very bad to bear."

"It would be, dear, if we did not know how much was suffered for us—the memory of *that* must make all things light."

A change came over the dying child's face, and she looked up lovingly and gratefully into the kind eyes which were bending over her.

"Good bye, ma'am; it's all bright now. I'm going where there will be no more pain."

Then all was over, and Kate Graham closed the dark eyes, and passed on to speak kind words of greeting and of comfort to others who were lying in pain and sickness on that Christmas night.

Her life was lonely enough now. Mrs. Graham had been dead two years, and Nora's interests were centred in her German home.

There were none in the wide world who cared for Kate first, who loved her best. She had kept firm to her resolution, she had never gone to Basselton Manor, notwithstanding the oft repeated invitations

from Lionel and his wife. She was resigned, nay even contented, and she felt that she must resist temptation, and fly from all that might in any way lead to evil.

So she made friends of those around her who were themselves homeless and friendless. Even now she has her reward in their love and gratitude, and in the world to come she will reap the full recompense of that sacrifice which she made on that August evening when she first saw Alice Morton.

PETER BARRETT'S LODGER.

PETER BARRETT'S LODGER.

It was a gloomy, gusty, foggy November day—a day upon which it seems a necessity of one's nature to grumble and be discontented, as though a little ebullition of temper could in any way mend matters, or make the outer world brighter or more genial. However, we must not moralize, but simply proceed to state facts.

Redsand (a village so named from the peculiar colour of its sandy beach) was about, the dreariest of all dreary localities on such a day as we have described, There were a few straggling cottages standing on the shore, sheltered by the high hills which rose directly above them, and on the summit of which had sprung up within the last few years two or three cockney looking villas, occupied during the summer months by families with hosts of children, who sought the pleasures and advantages to be derived from sea bathing. Anyone who had seen Redsand on the particular afternoon on which my story opens would certainly not have been very favourably impressed by it. For whenever it rained

or blew, or snowed anywhere else, so much harder did the wind blow, so much more fiercely did the rain or snow pour down at Redsand. Pitter, patter, came the heavy drops upon the glass covered railway station, whilst the porters, two in number, a middle aged man and a youth (evidently from the likeness between them father and son), walked up and down the platform.

"She be late," said the father in a pleasant cheery tone, "I've noticed that she always is late on wet days as if to spite us."

"She always is late, and nothing to get when she do come," answered the youth, somewhat sullenly. "Tom says this be the wust station on the line, ne'er a chance of a farthing from no one."

"We be forbidden to receive anything," answered Peter Barrett; "I've never took a farthing from no man except in particular cases, and I've always throve,"—a statement which young Peter, surveying his parent's ample proportions, did not attempt to contradict.

"What's a particular case, father?"

Peter the elder scratched his head and looked puzzled.

"Why, let me see, there be several: carrying of a babby, 'elping of a sick gentleman, smuggling in of a dog under his mistress' cloak, besides—" but

round the corner, seeming as if it must fall over the sloping bank, came the long train.

The boy's voice pronounced the name of the station somewhat languidly, and then he stood gazing into the window, setting his hopes of a "particular case" turning up in the person of a restive baby, who was screaming vociferously, and seemed anxious to emerge from its unwonted position; it was soon, however, reduced to obedience, and young Peter was turning disconsolately away, when from the other end of the train came a young voice—"Porter, porter." In an instant the boy was on the spot. It was a tear-stained sorrowful face which spoke to him—

"We were going on to B——, but my father is very ill, and can't bear the motion of the train any longer; we must get out here; we come from London; there are five packages addressed Wilmot."

The youth rushed off to the luggage van, whilst his father, with rough kindness, lifted the poor fainting gentleman from the carriage, and laid him on a seat.

"Grace," he murmured, "my poor child."

There was agony depicted on the young girl's face, but her voice was calm when she spoke to her father, and tried to soothe him.

"Dear papa, we will rest here."

"Rest," he repeated dreamily, as if the sound of the word brought comfort to him in his weariness.

Grace shuddered, for she thought of a rest to which he might be fast journeying, and *now* she had no one in the world but him—no one to look to, to protect her against the storms of life.

"What can I do for you, miss?" said Peter Barrett civilly; "it's but a poor place we've got down here, but the gentleman looks as if he wanted somewhat."

"Is there an hotel here?"

"Well, miss, there be the Blue Boar."

The name did not sound promising, and Grace shook her head.

"Are there any quiet lodgings?"

Peter bowed profoundly—"My missus would do for you as well as e'er a body in the place, and as reasonable too. And she's a rare one at nursing the sick."

The last recommendation was all powerful, and Grace was satisfied.

"Then you will get us a fly."

"There be only one at the Blue Boar, and that went ten mile off 'alf-an-hour agone."

Again the expression of helpess misery was on the fair young face.

Peter saw it—"Never fear, miss, I'll wheel him

on a truck; he'll sit as comfortable as in the Lord Mayor's coach."

It was an undignified mode of proceeding, but there appeared no help for it.

"Is it far off?" she asked anxiously.

"Not five minutes' walk, miss."

Very tenderly was the poor invalid laid in this novel equippage, hardly conscious of what was going on, only looking wistfully at his child whenever she moved out of his sight.

The boy was sent on to tell his mother of the unexpected addition to their little dwelling, and Mrs. Barrett stood waiting at the door to receive them. A meek-looking little woman, very thin and spare, was the worthy Peter's spouse, the best wife, the porter informed every one, in all Redsand; whilst her own satisfaction in her lord took an even wider range, and she always said that her Peter was the best husband in the world, and her son bid fair to walk in his father's footsteps.

But even for both the Peters she had very little thought now, all her attention was given to the sick man, and to the lovely girl who hung over him in anguish untold, unutterable.

He was laid on a small couch in the tiny, but scrupulously clean room, and he gazed round him vacantly; only there was a smile on the wan face as his eye fell upon Grace.

Peter the younger was dispatched for the doctor. He soon arrived—a bluff, good-hearted man, working amongst a mining population, not accustomed to deal with such natures as the girl's who stood before him, as if her own life depended on his verdict.

"Will he recover?" she asked.

Dr. Kemp shuffled first on one foot, then on the other—

"He's very ill; it's out of human power to tell what the end may be;" and then, as the expression of agony came on the girl's face, his voice softened, and he said, "Whilst there's life there's hope, my dear young lady; anyhow, it's in wiser hands than ours, but if you've any friend who would come and help you to nurse your father, you'd better write."

"Thank you; there is no one."

The words were simply said, but Peter and his wife looked compassionately upon the speaker: there was such entire desolation expressed in the tone in which they were uttered—in the look of love unspeakable Grace cast upon the form which lay there so still and death-like, the dim light of the tallow candle falling on the wan, suffering face.

The doctor promised to return at ten o'clock, and Grace sat alone with all that was left her on earth—seeking for some sign of amendment, but she could

see none. General Wilmot appeared unconscious of all around him. At last the weary eyelids drooped, and Dr. Kemp pronounced that deep sleep, more likely to be of benefit to his patient than aught else.

"There's a small room upstairs, miss, ready for you, and you must go and get a few hours' sleep," said Mrs. Barrett; "*I*'ll stay with your papa," and the poor woman proceeded to unfasten Grace's dress.

The good girl feebly resisted; her's was a gentle, trustful spirit, ever yielding obedience to those around her, and she was completely tired out.

"I can't leave him alone."

Mrs. Barrett drew herself up with dignity.

"I flatter myself, miss, that in all Redsand there ain't a woman knows better than I do how to tend upon the sick."

Grace saw she had offended, and apologized.

"Oh, I am so sorry; I did not think you would be so kind, but indeed I am very grateful; I was up all last night, and I do feel a little rest would do me good, but you will be tired."

"Law bless you, poor lamb; I thinks nothing of five nights one after the other; ask Peter."

But Grace only reiterated her thanks, and bent over the couch lovingly, with a lingering feeling that she could not leave her dear one with a stranger.

"You will promise to call me if he awakes, or if there should be the slightest change."

Mrs. Barrett promised, with tears in her eyes; she was by no means of a poetical temperament, but as the girl stood there in her youth and loveliness, bending over the sleeper with such a world of love and pity in her sweet face, the good woman thought of a picture that had hung up in her father's cottage years ago when she was a girl; of an angel hovering over one whose earthly race was well nigh run, and with the remembrance came a whole host of other memories of the past—of many a one she had loved, over whose couch the Angel of Death had leant, and taken from the evil to come. One kiss on the suffering brow, and Grace went up the narrow staircase to the little room, which had been made as comfortable as it could be for her.

She went to the window and gazed out into the night: there was the boundless sea, the beach with its peculiar-coloured sand, shining in the moonlight, and the stars were bright in the cold wintry sky; the evening of that day was not so dismal as had been the earlier part of it.

Hope came into the girl's heart as if it were borne to her on the plashing waves, ever advancing and receding, telling in soft, low murmurs tales of the wonders of the deep, of the mighty, infinite love

which can still the raging of the boundless ocean, and say alike to the tossing waves of the sea, and to the floods of misery which sometimes threaten to overwhelm the heart of man, "Peace, be still."

Grace slept the heavy, dreamless sleep often in mercy granted to the afflicted. Daylight was creeping into the room when she awoke, to see Mrs. Barrett standing at her side.

"Is he better?" she asked nervously, feeling self-reproachful at the thought of how long she had been away from the sick man's room.

Mrs. Barrett shook her head; it was against her creed to raise hopes when she felt there was no ground for them.

"He'll be better soon, miss; God will take him to Himself, to where there's no more pain nor sickness; you must not seek to keep him in this weary world, where at best there's nought but trouble."

The girl's fears were aroused—"Tell me," she said vehemently, "is he dead, or why was I not called before?"

"He's asleep, my dear, as you left him; he's not suffering now; perhaps though you had better dress and come to him."

Grace rose hastily and performed her toilette. She opened the shutter to let in the pale morning light; the sea looked very dark and murky against

the grey sky; the hope that had been in the girl's heart the night before almost died out now as she surveyed the dreary landscape; it went away entirely, as a few minutes later she stood at her father's side, and noted the change which those few short hours had wrought in his appearance ;the deadly pallor, the sunken eyes, the troubled breathing. True, he slept quietly and was in no pain, and so it went on all day. Grace sat there as one in a trance, and Mrs. Barrett moved about the room quietly, and performed her household tasks, and "the Peters," father and son, came into their meals, the elder trying to administer some rough words of comfort to poor Grace, who smiled a strange, unmeaning smile, and thanked him; whilst the boy stood in the door-way awed and wondering; for he had never before seen the approach of the stern messenger. The doctor shook his head; the quiet sleep upon which he had built his hopes of his patient's recovery was *too* quiet—it was but the forerunner of the deep, calm repose from which on earth there is no awakening.

The waves danced noisily against the shore, the tide ebbed and flowed; the short autumn day was at an end; there was light neither within nor without, and still Grace kept her mournful vigil.

"Grace, my child," it was her father's voice which

spoke the words; "I am going to your mother and to Frank; tell him—"

Grace bent low to catch the unintelligible words, and those who stood near heard her low, passionate whisper, "Father, you *must* forgive now."

But the lips did not move, only a smile came across the weary face; perhaps the angels heard those longed for words of pardon which were denied to mortal ear. The stars were shining in the heavens now, but there was no more need of light for him who was gone from this world's weariness; only upon that poor child left alone in the world, God in His mercy shed the light of his Peace and love.

CHAPTER II.

A WEEK passed away—such a week as many of us have known, when after "laying our darlings on earth's quiet breast," we return with the sense of loneliness and misery upon us, to bear our heavy burden, and fight the battle of life, without the loving voice to cheer us on our way—without the watchful eye upon us, which took note of our every change of countenance. General Wilmot lay in the little quiet churchyard of Redsand, and Grace, stunned and bewildered, sat in the little room in the Barretts' cottage, and folks wondered what she would do next.

"A lady like that could not live in such a poor place always," they said.

But a month passed away, and she was there still. The good, honest people asked but few questions; Grace paid her rent, and seemed to have money at her command, and her being there was a help to them during the dreary winter. But the porter and his wife were strangely disinterested people, and they saw for themselves what their neighbours had

judged for them, that their poor place was no fitting abode for one so gentle and refined as Grace.

"Now, miss," said Peter the elder as he opened the door of the little sanded parlor which had been appropriated exclusively to the sorrowful girl, "we don't want to be curious, me and my missus, although perhaps she has most of that helement about her—the fair sex always has, but we do pity you, miss, and we can't help a-seein' that such as we ain't fit company for you, and though 'twill be a loss to us in every way, miss, we can't seek to keep you a-pining here; you must go to your friends."

"Friends!" Grace repeated the words in a strange, melancholy tone, as if wondering where *they* were to be found; then her soft brown eyes were raised wistfully to honest Peter's face, and she said,

"Oh, Mr. Barrett, don't turn me out—I don't know where to go."

Peter dashed his great rough hand across his face—"Turn you out! Bless your sweet face, I ain't the man to do the like of that; 'twas only the idea that we wasn't good enough for you."

Grace's little hand was laid upon the porter's broad palm—"Never say that again, Mr. Barrett; you and your wife were my friends in my great trouble; I can never reward you for all your kindness; I can only pray God to do so."

So it was all settled, and Grace was henceforth recognized as an inmate of the Barretts' cottage.

Christmas came with all its varied feelings of joy and sorrow; of thankfulness to all for the one great blessing which it always brings, but fraught with sad memories to many who like Grace mourned the absence of some dear one, whose presence had cheered the last glad season.

The village church was dressed with holly; the wondrous oft told tale of love, and peace, and good-will, which had been repeated for more than eighteen hundred years, was again heralded forth, and Grace in her loneliness sat and listened to words which spoke of hope and comfort, and the peace for which she had striven for weeks seemed to be sent her on that Christmas-day as a special gift. The congregation left the little church, the stranger waited until the last amongst them had disappeared, and then she stood in the churchyard at the spot which was dearest to her on earth. Sad memories of the past filled her mind there, gloomy forebodings for the future which lay all untried before her; she heeded not the cold east wind which whistled so mournfully amongst the old yew trees, nor the large flakes of snow which were falling thickly around her.

A deep sob, almost a cry, roused her from her

reverie—a young girl stood not far from her, weeping as if her heart would break.

"Poor girl," said Grace, "kindly, you are in trouble—so am I."

The dirty, sorrowing face was raised in an instant; there was a sense of fellowship and sympathy in their mutual grief.

"You be the young lady at Mrs. Barrett's, whose father died?"

"Yes."

"Then you ain't so badly off as me, for three of mine was killed in the mines last week—my father and my two brothers."

Grace had heard of the accident—"Poor girl," she repeated, "I am sorry for you."

"Yes," continued the other eagerly, "it would have been bad enough if father had been took, for he was old, and he oftentimes said his race was well nigh run; but the lads, they were so strong and healthy; they went out that morning laughing and so cheery-like, and all three of them was brought home afore night—dead. And now I'm all alone. You've only lost one, miss, I've lost three;" and again there was the long melancholy wail.

"I had two brothers also," said Grace quietly.

"And you've lost them both like me; God pity you, miss."

"Both," answered Grace dreamily. "Yes, I have lost them both. Better mourn the dead sometimes than the living," she continued, almost bitterly; "better think of them at rest in Paradise than wandering upon the earth dishonoured, and branded with shame."

The young girl looked up at her companion wonderingly, but did not speak, and Grace, with a few kind words and promises of help, (which, we may here remark, were amply fulfilled,) walked on musingly to her new home.

She had learnt a lesson on that day which she never forgot: there were troubles and sorrows in the world as great as hers, miseries which she in her affluence would never experience, but which it might be in her power to alleviate.

Through all the dreary winter months Grace sought to soothe the woes of those around her, and in so doing found the best solace for her own. She learnt to know the poor people around her, and her gentle voice and sweet, winning ways carried comfort to many a weary heart. Her own, poor girl, was sad enough still. Every day, whatever the weather might be, she walked to the post-office to ask if a letter had arrived for her; she always met with the same reply from the good-natured postman,—

"Nothing to-day, miss; better luck pr'aps, to-morrow."

She had learnt to smile at the words, but the "better luck" never came, and the crushing weight of suspense grew heavier each time she heard them pronounced.

CHAPTER III.

April came heralding in the bright, joyous springtime. All nature was revelling in the return of the warm, genial sunshine—the tiny flowers raised their heads above the earth, the birds carolled gladly, the leaves burst forth in all their verdant glory—winter cares were put away from men's minds—no more cold, dreary days yet awhile for the honest labourer—no more hard, piercing nights for many months to come.

But amidst all this returning joy, the cloud on Grace's brow deepened and her footsteps flagged, and the dreary walk to the post-office was productive of the same result—or rather of none. For fraught with the memories of the greatest joy and the greatest sorrow of her life came the bright springtide to the sorrowing girl.

For years Grace Wilmot's lot had been a very uneventful one. Her mother had died in India a few days after her birth, and she and her little brothers were sent home to the care of some friend of General Wilmot's, who after a time sent the chil-

dren to school, and then had them to spend the holidays at his house. When Grace was seventeen her father came home somewhat unexpectedly, and the simple, but very lovely schoolgirl was transformed into the mistress of the pretty country house in which General Wilmot at once established himself. It had been his dream for years, the incentive to all his toil, the hope of many a weary day, that the end of his life might be spent in some quiet retirement with his child. The boys he knew must seek their own fortunes. In her father's eyes Grace was more than all he had ever dared to hope she would be. So was Frank, his eldest son, a lieutenant in her Majesty's 123rd Foot; but from the first moment he saw him General Wilmot could not conceal his disappointment in his second boy Horace, a dark, strange-looking youth, with a low, heavy brow, over which the black hair hung in somewhat disordered masses, and an expression about the firm, well-set mouth, which his father set down to sullenness and obstinacy, but in which an unprejudiced observer might have read no common determination and endurance. The youth saw the look which greeted him, and felt it keenly; from that moment he never intruded, never pushed himself forward, but the grievance was ever rankling within him, and on no one occasion did he yield his will to his father's.

A clerkship in the the India House had been given him, without his choice of a profession ever having been asked, and writhing under the sense of injustice he buried his dreams of learning and ambition deep in his own heart, and worked with all the power and determination of his strong will, at his appointed tasks.

The world held but one bright spot for Horace Wilmot—his sisters Grace's love—one expressed wish of the gentle girl's would melt the rough youth's heart into something almost akin to a woman's tenderness; whilst the darkness of Grace's life was caused by the unspoken, but not to be concealed, ill-feeling which existed between her father and her younger brother. She fell into the common fashion of idolizing and spoiling Frank; he was so bright, and good, and noble. Surely, it was but natural that all who came in his way should love him; and yet there was an unspoken conviction in Grace's heart that all this worship was wronging Horace, that in the hour of trouble (if it ever came) that strong, resolute will might stand in better stead than the somewhat weak, vacillating character of the elder brother.

But it was seldom that such gloomy thoughts intruded themselves upon the young, joyous girl, whose life seemed to be made up of perpetual sunshine.

It was some comfort to her too, that there was one besides herself who appreciated Horace's worth, and that was Ralph Wentworth, the young master of Broadlands, the next estate to General Wilmot's.

Mr. Wentworth was a grave, some said a stern man, but the laughter loving Grace never thought him so, and one April morning in his quiet way, but with an impassioned tenderness that was all the more precious because it was so rare, he asked the gentle girl to be his wife.

She hardly dared believe in her great happiness. Both her brothers were at home, one for a short leave, the other during the Easter holidays, and it seemed as if there were nothing wanting to complete her joy—Nothing did we say? Alas! even from such gladness as this, the skeleton in the cupboard was not to be excluded.

General Wilmot and Horace seemed to be more than ever estranged; and yet how the poor fellow longed for one kind word from his father, for one such loving glance as always rested upon Frank.

There was one failing which Frank possessed, which was guessed at by none but his brother. He wanted courage, both moral and physical; the heavy browed Horace would have been braver on the battlefield than would the handsome, dashing young officer.

It chanced one morning ere that same month of April had passed away that a new dog cart and horse, which Frank had purchased were brought up to the hall door, to be inspected by General Wilmot, Horace, and Grace.

The beautiful steed was restive and fidgetty,—some evil genius must have prompted Horace; it was one of those moments coming suddenly, and ruling the destiny of a life time. He saw his father's proud glance fall on his elder son as he stood at the horse's head, and the colour rushed to the sallow cheek, and the dark eye flashed with a strange fire as he said, "You will never drive him, Frank, never."

"So I was a thinking, sir," said the groom, civilly; "there's something about him as would want that chap Rarey to tame,—'twould be a brave man as would."

"A brave man," interrupted Horace, "will you try it, Frank?"

Frank saw the taunt.

"Yes, I will; I am not afraid;" but his cheek blanched, and his appearance belied his words.

The father was not slow to perceive what was passing between his sons. "Frank, my dear boy," he said "don't try it, let Horace do so if he likes."

The evil spirit was uppermost still in Horace's

breast. "Horace," he repeated, mockingly; "oh yes; the ugly second son,—it does not matter what happens to him, so long as the heir is safe."

He jumped up into the dog cart and sat there triumphantly, his voice soothing the prancing steed with a strange power.

All that was manly in Frank was roused at this; in an instant he was at Horace's side, and taking the reins into his hand he drove off, so quickly that Grace's fears were all allayed, and the incident which, alas! was one of too frequent occurrence, was forgotten by General Wilmot all through the day.

At last the dinner hour arrived, Ralph Wentworth appeared, but even in his society Grace grew nervous and restless, straining her ear to catch every sound; and General Wilmot walked up and down the long drawing-room in ill-concealed agitation.

At last a sound broke upon the ears of the listeners; a low, measured tread, as of men carrying some heavy burden.

Grace left the room; the next minute there was a long loud scream, echoing through the still evening air, and General Willmot and Ralph hastened to the hall door.

A few hours later, the April moon shone into the little window of Horace Wilmot's room. He turned upon his couch, restless and uneasy, and at his side

stood his father, with a look of agony on his face, which those who saw it could never forget.

Horace seemed to have but a dim recollection of how he came to be there; only, when General Wilmot spoke, the expression of misery on the son's features was more heart-rending than on those of the father.

"Rise, sir, and follow me."

And at that stern bidding, Horace rallied all his strength and followed General Wilmot to Frank's room.

There on the narrow bed, lay the pale, still form, the noble features fixed and calm, the moonlight shining all holy and serene upon a face more beautiful in its sweet repose than it had ever been, even in life. Frank Wilmot was dead, and Horace stood and gazed upon his brother's face.

"It is your work, sir," said his father; "to-night you quit the shelter of my roof for ever; he who has robbed me of my first-born shall not step into his inheritance."

For an instant Horace barely comprehended the meaning of these cruel words. Then the truth flashed upon him, at first somewhat dimly, then in all its unmitigated horror—that he was accused of being Frank's murderer. With the reverence which a devotee might pay to a saint he stooped and kissed

the cold face, his long black hair sweeping over the fair brow of his dead brother.

The father lifted one bright lock of chestnut hair from his firstborn's temple, and disclosed a black spot, as of a heavy blow.

"Begone, sir, ere I curse you—for your dead mother's sake I will not give you up to justice."

Horace, ill and half delirious left his father's house that night without one word of explanation to Grace; without one attempt to vindicate himself from the fearful charge imputed to him.

None had seen how the dire calamity had happened. A workman, on his way from his day's toil, had found the brothers lying on the road side, the one apparently exhausted by fatigue, the other quite dead, with the mark of a heavy blow upon his temple. The man was stupid, and apparently had not noticed this; the shattered dog-cart seemed to him to explain all. So there was no enquiry set on foot, no inquest;—but Grace and her father had no doubt as to whose hand had dealt the merciless stroke.

The old man's heart was well nigh broken, he had been stern and uncompromising at first; but afterwards (perhaps when he felt that his end was not far off) there were softer feelings at work within him, a wish that Horace had been allowed to speak

one word of self-defence, but he had gone none knew whither; he had been traced to Canada through a brother clerk who had been his great freind in the India House, but then all signs of him disappeared, and poor Grace thought that her cup of bitterness was full to overflowing. But there was one drop more to be added to it, one other hope and light to be extinguished out of that young heart, one more sorrow yet to be be borne. People said that Ralph Wentworth was proud; Grace always maintained that it was not his fault, that it had been the failure of his ancestors for untold generations. Now his pride was stronger than his love. The rumours that in some unaccountable way had become current in the neighbourhood reached his ears, and after a long struggle with his better nature, Ralph came to the conclusion that he was committing an act of extreme self denial, worthy of being chronicled amongst deeds of martyrdom, but the duty he owed to society as a Wentworth forbade his alliance with one upon whose name a breath of suspicion had fallen. So he gave up Grace; wrote her a long loving letter, setting forth his duty and his sufferings in such plausible terms that she loved him better than ever, and treasured up those assurances of his love as her most precious possession; whilst he, really troubled and ill at ease, went abroad, made

the grand tour, came back, and—but we must not anticipate. The old country house was let, and Grace set out with her father in search of the health he had lost. They did not even take a servant away with them. The poor old man's one wish was to get far from those who had known him in brighter days.

Grace, ever loving and gentle, but with a world of care on her young brow, vowed to devote her whole life to cheer her father's declining years. The sacrfice was not long required at her hands. General Wilmot was very ill when they left home, he was worse when they reached London, but he would not be prevailed upon to postpone his journey westward, and so it chanced that the dying man and the fair girl arrived at Redsand, on the gloomy November afternoon on which our story commences.

CHAPTER IV.

The Vicar of Redsand was a young clergyman of strictly Anglican principles. His coat and waistcoat were of an unexceptionable cut, his voice when he intoned the services was perfection. He never ate anything but bread and cheese on Fridays, and I hope it does not in any way take from the merit of that particular abstinence on that particular day when I confide to you that on many other days in the week, his nicely dressed little dinner was sent away untouched, to pamper the appetite of some poor invalid, whilst Cyril Mordaunt himself sat and munched his bread and cheese in perfect contentment, and devoted his thoughts to the first chapter of a work on the celibacy of the clergy. Somehow he could not get any farther. His laudable efforts had received a check in the shape of a young, graceful figure in a black dress, which was for ever hovering like some ministering angel about the wretched hovels of Redsand; and I am sorry to have to relate (but I am bound to be truthful) that the Nicar, who had a decided talent for drawing, was

bent upon a frontispiece for the aforesaid volume, which was to have represented a catholic clergyman of austere demeanour, dressed in a costume somewhat resembling that of a monk. The garb was perfection, and might have served as a model for the most austere friar; but, alas for poor human nature! the face, which was to have represented the stern divine, bore a most unaccountable resemblance to Grace Wilmot.

The Vicar was angry with himself, but could hardly forbear a smile at the comical effect this produced, and so on the particular Friday of which I am now writing, he shut his books and put away his papers, and resolved that he must school himself into submission to his appointed lot.

A knock at the door interrupted his meditations. "Please, sir, there's a man a dying at Mrs. Long's; he came there last night; he's one of them tramps, and he's got something on his mind."

In an instant the Vicar's hat was on his head, and all else was forgotten in the duties of his sacred calling.

He entered the miserable hut. His kind words seemed to bring light and peace where all was dark and gloomy. He sat by the side of the sick man's bed; long into the April twilight he was there, with his grave, quiet face, listening to a deed of

bloodshed and wrong, pouring comfort as best he could into the sorrowing, repentant heart.

Only a change came across his sad features, a bright crimson flush extended over his sunburnt cheek, when the guilty man at the end of his confession told his victim's name.

"You knew the family well, I thinkyou said; was there a daughter?"

"Yes, sir; Miss Grace—she was—"

But the Vicar did not wish to hear more: there must be no thought of earth in his mind now, no care but to smoothe the passage of the dark valley for the poor wretch who was lying before him.

All was over before Mr. Mordaunt left the hovel. The sinner had gone to his account, and the mercy extended to the dying thief none can dare to say was withheld from him.

The vicar walked on quickly to Peter Barrett's dwelling.

He met young Peter on the way, who stopped, expecting a word of notice from the usually courteous clergyman.

Mr. Mordaunt saw what was expected of him.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"To the post office, to enquire if there be a letter for our young lady. She aint very well to-day, and *can't come out* herself, so guv me 'alf a crown to go

on her errands; that's more than I ever gets for any particular case down at the station."

The Vicar smiled and passed on.

"Is Miss Wilmot well enough to see me?" he asked of Mrs. Barrett, who stood at the cottage door.

"I'll see, please, sir; she's had a very bad headache all day."

"Tell her I have come on particular business, or I should not have intruded at this hour," and the Vicar's voice trembled strangely as he spoke.

In an instant Mrs. Barrett re-appeared.

"Miss Wilmot would be delighted to see Mr. Mordaunt."

The Vicar entered the little parlour somewhat awkwardly. He had never visited Grace but once before, upon some parish business. She received him in her own gentle, self-possessed way, and he sat down, not daring to look at her. "I have come from a sad scene," he said; "one of those unfortunate tramps who was hurt yesterday on the railway is just dead. He does not come from these part—she told me his home was in ——."

Grace started, and the Vicar went on. "I heard a dreadful confession from his lips, which he has asked me to make public. I have brought it first to you, for, Miss Wilmot, I think that that man's avowal of

guilt may strangely affect you. Was your home in ———?

"Yes," answered Grace quietly, but in a strange unnatural tone; "tell me all—I can bear it."

"I must give you his written words," and he took from his pocket the paper on which he had written the dying man's confession.

"It's a year agone now, one day last April, I was most starving, and as I sat on the roadside near my native village Dunmore, I saw two young gentlemen driving along in a dog cart. I went up to them and begged; one of them, the dark one, threw me down a shilling, and the other, he who was driving, the best looking of the two, took his whip, and gave me a stinging cut across my cheek. I suppose I deserved it, for I had insulted him once, and I saw he knew me again. I vowed vengeance on him in that moment, I went to the public house and drank hard, and then I went to sleep again in the same place. It might have been about four o'clock in the afternoon that I was woke by a loud noise; 'twas the same dog cart coming along, the horse had took fright, the trap flung against a big stone, and the two young gents was thrown out. The dark one, him as had been kind to me, I thought was dead, but the other who had laughed at me moved his hand. *God forgive me!* I took my stick, and dealt him

such a blow upon the temple as I knew would kill him. Weeks afterwards I heard that the other brother, who after all was not dead, had been turned out of his father's house. There was ugly stories told in the neighbourhood that he had murdered his brother. I was the only person who could have told them the truth and I went away.

"The old gentleman left his home, most broken hearted. I pray God and those who I have injured to forgive me, as I hope for mercy where I am going. It was the two young Mr. Wilmots who was in the dog cart. Folks said that they had had high words before they left home, but they was laughing and talking quite friendly like, when I see'd them pass in the morning. This is my last dying confession.

"JAMES MICHELMORE."

Grace heard the words to the end. Then, as if unmindful of the Vicar's presence, she fell on her knees and said, "O, God, I thank Thee for Thy infinite mercy."

Then she turned to Mr. Mordaunt:

"Oh, if my father could but have heard it."

"Perhaps he knows it now," said the Vicar. "Anyhow, there is no more trouble where he is. And now, Miss Wilmot, can I do anything for you? Need I say that you have only to command my services."

Grace looked up quickly. "Thank you," she said, "for telling me all this. Frank's death and Horace's supposed guilt killed my father. I think only the hope that some day or other it would all be made clear has kept me alive. I must go and seek my brother now, wherever he may be. I have written letter after letter to that place in Canada, where he was last heard of, but no answer has come. Tell me where I can find him?" and the soft brown eyes, which had on one occasion unnerved worthy Peter Barrett, were raised wistfully to the Vicar's face.

He stood for one instant irresolute, perhaps breathing a parting sigh to the loss the world would sustain in the non-publication of "The Celibacy of the Clergy." Then he spoke.

"Grace, give me the right to seek him; promise me the reward I shall ask, when I have found him."

Grace did not understand what he meant.

"You cannot leave your duty," she said.

"Yes, I can; even that is provided for. I had a letter from a friend, this morning, who has come home from one of the colonies; he wants home work for a time, he will take mine; only give me a special right to seek your brother." And he took the girl's hand in his, and looked into her face.

She could not misunderstand him now.

"Mr. Mordaunt, I have nothing but my thanks to give. My life has been too sad for me ever to think of linking it with another. Please say no more about it; you have been so kind and good to me."

He saw the subject pained her.

"Then give me only the right of a friend," he said, hope dying in his heart, and his way looking all dim and uncertain before him. "Write down all the particulars you have ever heard of your brother since he left his home, send them up to me to-night; to-morrow I shall start for London. Make this Michelmore's confession public, and if your brother lives he shall hear he is acquitted of the base crime impnted to him. Grace, goodbye, only bid God speed me on my way."

She gave him her hand trustfully, and he bent down and kissed it.

"God speed you," she said. "God reward you, for I never can."

"I shall find you here when I come back?" he said.

"Whenever it may be I will be here."

Then he left her, to go home and startle his old housekeeper with the intelligence that he intended leaving Redsand the next morning for an indefinite time.

Grace sat on in the darkness, as one in a dream.

Horace innocent, their fair name unstained—it was almost more than she dared believe possible.

"Too late." She murmured; "all too late for him and for me." Then she rang the bell for candles, and for the fiftieth time, that day, she read an announcement she had come across in a country paper, which Mrs. Barrett had brought her in.

"On the 16th inst. at Dunmore Church, by the Very Rev. the Dean of ——, Ralph Wentworth, Esq., of Dunmore Manor, to the Lady Mary Evelyn, only daughter of the Earl and Countess of Wickham."

Then she took from the folds of her dress the letter Ralph had written her, and held it to the candle, watching the last fragment die away; even as she felt her love must be uprooted; for *now* to care for him, would be sin.

Two days later, she received a few hurried lines from Mordaunt, who said that he was to sail for Canada on that very afternoon.

Then Grace relapsed into her old life, with one weight removed from her heart, whilst Ralph's fickleness had left another there, almost too hard to bear.

The bright summer days passed quickly away, the autumn leaves fell thick on General Wilmot's grave, and Grace grew restless for tidings of Mr. Mordaunt, but none came.

It was Christmas day again; the poor girl sat alone in her own room, whilst the Barretts entertained a select party in theirs. The noise and revelry were somewhat discordant to her, but she tried to make the best of it, and as if to reward her good resolutions there came a loud knock at the door, and for a moment the boisterous laughter ceased.

"Who's there?" said Peter Barrett.

"A friend; won't you welcome him home on Christmas night?"

And standing in the doorway, with a bright smile upon his face, was the Vicar of Redsand.

Grace rose from her seat, whilst he advanced a single step forwards, and then stopped, as awkward now as he had been on that April night eight months before.

"Miss Wilmot," he said, "I am not alone."

He did not see the look of fervent gratitude she cast upon him—he had turned to call in his companion.

A tall dark man, looking ten years older than his three-and-twenty summers warranted, with lines of care and suffering on his face, but with a softer expression about the stern resolute mouth than Grace had ever seen there before.

"Horace!" "Grace!"

There was a long fervent embrace, during which

the Vicar stood apart, talking to the astonished Peter, who hastened to explain the extraordinary event which had happened to his wondering guests.

"Grace," said Horace, "if it had not been for Mordaunt we never should have met again. I had buried myself in the back woods, and he traced me more closely than a Red Indian could have done. I don't know how he did it."

"I had a reward in view," said the Vicar, with a quiet smile upon his face. "Grace, will you give it me now?"

"He knows all," whispered Horace. "I saw Wentworth's marriage in an old *Times*." He left the room for a minute, and when he appeared again, Grace had agreed to become the Vicar's wife.

Christmas brightness had indeed come after all the longing and anxious expectations.

"Horace," said Grace, as long into the night the brother and sister talked of all that had happened, "was that man's story true—I mean about your being good friends in the morning?"

"Thank God, it was; I had asked his pardon for the taunt I offered him, and he granted it. Without this remembrance, Grace, I don't think I could have borne all my misery."

A few more months, and the merry bells rang out *their glad* welcome to the Vicar's wife.

Years have passed since then, and Cyril Mordaunt thinks that no one in all the world is equal to his Grace, and truly she has found the sunshine of her life after all the clouds, which darkened her girlhood.

"Uncle Horace," so Cyril's and Grace's children call him, sits on the lawn in summer, and in the study in winter, a pale, grave man, writing "big books," which his nephews and nieces think extremely stupid; nevertheless they love the author with all their warm young hearts, for they have never seen him angry, but once, and that was when his second nephew taunted his elder brother for some boyish failing. Then Uncle Horace told the children the story of his life, very much in the same words as I have written it here.

MARY SINCLAIR,

AN OLD MAN'S STORY.

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AN OLD MAN'S STORY.

CHAPTER I.

I AM an old man now, foolishly old to take to book writing, or story telling, but some fifteen years ago I went (for reasons which will presently appear) to a place called Barton on the Lea, a small town in the North, where a mineral spring, supposed to be efficacious in the cure of gout, had lately been discovered. I cannot for the life of me understand how it is that I should be so afflicted, certainly I have not inherited it, and I always was a man of moderate habits; particularly so for a bachelor and a London swell, which I beg leave to observe I was in my youth, although I am afraid no one thinks much of me now. However, there was no disputing the fact that with advancing years I became a confirmedly gouty subject, and my doctor sent me to Barton on

the Lea, to see what drinking the waters might do for me.

It was not a very amusing locality, and after the bustle of my town life, I could ill brook the perfect quiet and stagnation of the place, so I took to occupying myself with the affairs of those who lived around me in the little world of this quiet country village.

Next door to my lodgings I heard that a lady was dying of consumption. My observations showed me that things did not go on very prosperously at No. 4, and the little help a stranger could volunteer, I offered. I made acquaintance with the three children of the dying woman, the two younger ones were my almost daily companions in my walks, but my especial favorite was the eldest girl, Mary.

Years have passed since then, and I have never forgotten her, or lost sight of her. Last Christmas, sitting round the fire in my sister's home, I told my nieces the story of that girl's life. They were pleased to say they liked it, and asked me to write it and have it printed, so I have tried to put facts together, very imperfectly of course, for I am at best a stupid old fellow, and this is but a plain hum-drum chronicle, which many people will probably not have the patience to wade through; by way of preface I *promise* them that the chronicle shall be short, and *the facts* true.

It was a dark dreary November day, the chill, autumnal wind howled dismally through the one street of Barton on the Lea, the rain beat against the windows, as though it never meant to stop, as if its monotonous pitter-patter had became an institution not to be done away with.

Come out of the howling wind and the drizzling rain, ascend with me a narrow staircase, enter a room which—how shall I describe it?

There is a certain romance attached to a luxuriously furnished apartment, with its soft carpets, and silken hangings, its velvet couches and fanteuis—and strange as the comparison may seem, there is an equal amount of romance, even a greater degree of interest, bestowed upon a carpetless room and a low trussle bed, and a flower-pot standing in a high attic window, containing some tall straggling geranium, which has been reared and cared for, through an atmosphere of London smoke, and has spoken of home, and the far off cottage garden to some poor wanderer who has been launched upon the perilous sea of London life.

But to neither of these distinctive classes could the room which I have asked you to enter with me be said to belong.

Has it ever been your lot to occupy small lodgings in some provincial town, or at some second class

watering place? If it has, you may form some idea of what that apartment was like which I wish to describe to you.

There was a Kidderminster carpet, which some twenty years before may have been whole and bright, but which now was threadbare and dingy in the extreme. There was a paper on the walls which would have been pleasanter to the eye, if it *had* been a litle more faded. The ground was drab, and scarlet monkeys were represented climbing up bluish-green trees, and somehow the animals seemed to be grinning at you whichever way you looked. There was a four post bed occupying by far the largest portion of the room, and there were orange coloured curtains hanging from it, which seemed to shed a strange lurid light upon all the other objects. Then there was a clock which ticked in a strange asthmatic manner; which marked the time now, as a life was fast passing away, and an unbidden guest was hovering near.

There was no refinement about the place, neither of wealth nor of poverty, nothing but what was vulgar and common and uninteresting; until looking in the fast fading light, beneath the gay patchwork quilt, you saw a human face on the pillow, a face white as a lily, pure as one would magine an angel's to be, and *above the* incessant patter of the rain and the

spasmodic ticking of the old clock, rose a voice that even in its husky and faltering tones had a certain sweetness in its saying:

"You will take care of Mary, when I am gone. Only say you will?"

The answer came from a man who stood by the bedside, a big, burly looking individual, with a red, coarse face, long since dead to most human feelings, but softened into something like compassion and remorse now, as he watched the last looks and listened to the last words of the woman, whose life he had made wretched, whom he had taken from a life of comparative affluence, to one made poor and miserable by the bane of his existence—drink.

Years before, John Sinclair, when an ensign in a marching regiment, had wooed, and won, the lovely daughter of Mr. Wright, the well-to-do surgeon of Barton on the Lea.

The regiment was soon ordered to the Cape; there was a bitter parting from the old folks at home, and Mary Sinclair, with bright visons of future happiness before her, turned her eyes to the far off land where her lot was to be cast, and prayed in her simplicity and innocence that she might do her duty to her husband, and make him as happy as she hoped she had done during those first two months of her married life.

The prayer was answered, inasmuch that she never once flinched from giving John Sinclair all wifely duty and obedience. When gradually, but surely, he became a drunkard and a profligate, she never wavered in womanly love.

When at last he received a gentle hint that he had better leave the regiment, she made the best of it to the world, and worked harder than ever for him and her children in the new life on the frontier, where John took to farming.

At last there came a day when, for no apparent reason, her husband told her that he intended returning to England.

She did not very much care what happened to her. Her father and mother were dead, her only brother had married and settled in Australia, there did not seem much inducement to leave the farm for the uncertainty of what they might find at home, but her husband was determined to have his will, and one October day, after eighteen years' absence, they again set foot on English ground.

The voyage had been long and irksome, and the wife's energies deserted her, when there seemed no further necessity for exertion.

The doctor on board ship said that she had not many weeks to live; she smiled when she heard it, a *sad, somewhat* weary smile, for there were many

things to be regretted in the world, although the thought of rest was very sweet after the troubled days of her life.

"Take me home, John," she said, as tender-hearted sailors carried her on shore at Liverpool, and glanced compassionately at the woman's frame.

"Home," he said, "do you mean to Barton? there is no one there belonging to you now."

"I know that, John, but there's the old church where we were married, and where I was baptized, and there's the churchyard where father and mother lie; and then there is the dear old Vicar, I should like to see him again, and to know that he would read the last holy words over me when I am laid to my rest beside the dear old people."

John could not gainsay a wish of hers then, although he had thwarted and opposed her all the days of her married life, so they went to Barton on the Lea, and the old Vicar paid the dying woman daily visits, and soothed the last hours of her life with words of comfort and of peace.

On that dreary November afternoon the doctor's decree had gone forth, "in all human probability she cannot live another day."

And so, stunned by the nearness of his loss, John Sinclair stood, as I have said, in that chamber of death.

His wife had asked to see him alone, had spoken to him in all gentleness, and forgiven him all the wretchedness he had brought upon her.

Some dim perception of the great mistake he had made in his life, seemed to dawn upon him then, and in his inmost heart he vowed to be faithful to his wife's last wishes.

"I will, Mary, so help me God," was his answer to the words in which she entreated him to take care of their first born child.

"I don't say a word about the others, John, about Edith and Hugh; *she* will look after *them*, if you will only take care of *her*."

Again the man bent his head upon the coverlet, and said, "I will, so help me God." Then, with still greater difficulty the wife spoke. "John, will you give up that awful sin. We might have been so happy all our lives, if it had not been for that?"

"I will try that too, Mary," he answered humbly. "I could promise you anything now, my dear."

An expression of almost unearthly beauty stole over the wasted features, and the words of that one most perfect prayer came from the dying lips: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from eveil.

"Amen," was said in a young fresh voice, *and there* stood at the dying mother's side the *Mary for* whom she seemed to dread so much.

Somehow that dingy room seemed changed when the girl entered it.

She came in smiling, holding in her hand some rare winter flowers. She was simply, it may have been poorly, dressed, but the fact that she was a lady was unmistakeable. You saw it every movement of the youthful, rounded figure, you heard it in every intonation of the peculiarly sweet voice.

And the face? I don't know that it was strictly beautiful; its contour was certainly not perfect, but there was a bright rich colour on the cheeks, and a soft loving expression in the velvet brown eyes which to me was very charming; the mouth which disclosed the row of pearly teeth was not very small, but told of firmness and character and energy, whilst the rich hair brushed smoothly back from the low classical brow, and gathered into a loose knot, showed to perfection the graceful proportions of the small head.

The seventeen years of her life had not sat lightly on Mary Sinclair; even through all the youthful brightness, there was a wistful, troubled expression on the fair face.

"Mother, dear, look at these lovely flowers, Number Three has just sent you." (I was never called by any other name than Number Three by the young Sinclairs.) There was no answer, only the father's groans came low and thick.

Mary drew nearer to the bed, none had yet had the courage to tell her the doctor's verdict.

"Mother dearest, are you awake?"

"My own good darling," and the thin hand rested lovingly on the glorious hair. "God help and comfort you when I am gone, and, Mary, you will be good to him for my sake."

Then the girl rose and went round to where the father knelt, and put her arm round him, as if she in her weakness took upon herself the entire charge of that great strong man.

It was the last earthly sight the dying wife and mother saw. "I see it shining now," they heard her "I am coming to you, Edie, darling."

They knew that her thoughts were wandering to the churchyard on the hill-side, in that distant land, where a white cross marked the grave of her youngest darling, a sunny haired little maiden of three years old. For another hour she lay there breathing so calmly and peacefully that they thought she slept—then came the words,

"In life, in death, O Lord remember me."

Then the father and daughter knew that she would wake no more on earth.

CHAPTER II.

A FORTNIGHT had passed away, and in a dingy sitting room overlooking the one street of Barton on the Lea, the widower sat with the motherless children. Mary working hard at some black garment, Edith and Hugh gazing out of the window in a listless abstracted way.

The former was a fair, delicate, fragile looking child of twelve or thirteen, the boy a handsome independent urchin of ten.

Poor children, they had seen their mother in that sweet calm sleep, looking more strangely beautiful than she had done in the last days of her life, they knew that she had been laid in the quiet churchyard, and would never come to them any more, and yet they could not realize their loss, perhaps they had some feeling about it, which they could not have expressed, that it was *her* unspeakable gain.

Mary's fair cheek was paler now than it had been on that afternoon when she entered the room where her mother lay, and there was a wistful expression in the dark eyes, as if she would fain rid herself of

a burden which was almost too heavy for her to bear, for although saddened and subdued by the grief which had come to him, no one could have looked at John Sinclair as he sat there and not have feared the worst for him, not read in the weak sensual mouth, and the glassy, somewhat vacant eye, the vacillating, profligate character of the man.

"Hollo!" cried Hugh from his station at the window, "a carriage coming here, and a lady getting out, what a swell!"

Before the others had recovered their astonishment at the anouncement, a lady had advanced into the room, and taken Mary's hand in her's.

"Perhaps you never heard of me," she said, "Your mother and I were friends long ago at school, I was a little child of six years old, and she at sixteen was my never failing protectress. I left the neighbourhood just before she married, I only came back to it yesterday, when I heard about you. My name is Gertude Mordaunt."

The three young faces brightened at the words. Sitting in the twilight on the hill side at the far off Cape, the children had listened to endless stories of the lovely child who had been their mother's especial pet at school.

Mr. Sinclair advanced to meet the visitor, he was *a gentleman* still in manner, although sadly awkward

and nervous, as he gazed round the miserable room

It is very kind of you he said to come to us in this poor place, my wife has often spoken of you Miss———"

She saw the hesitating manner and said, "Yes, I am Miss Mordaunt still."

Mary fancied that there was a shade of sorrow in the tone, as if some hidden grief lay very deep down beneath the calm exterior.

Mary was right in her conjectures. Years before Gertrude Mordaunt had loved with a depth and passion of which few natures are capable.

The want of money had proved a barrier to the union of two people who seemed, as the old women say, "to have been made for each other," but they waited on year after year, trusting in each other's affection and knowing that all would come right in the end.

I suppose it did, I suppose that everything is always wisely ordered, but it was hard to bow to the decree which in one week left Gertrude an independant income, derived from a distant cousin, and brought her the news from the Mediterranean where her loved one was stationed with his regiment, that virulent fever had taken him beyond the reach of earthly poverty or riches.

Gertrude *did* submit, with all the strength of her

determined will, she conquered all outward show of grief, and a year afterwards, rich, flattered, and courted, she appeared to the world, a pale, sad woman, strangely silent and reserved; but to those in trouble and sorrow, to the needy and the erring, she was as an angel of mercy, carrying with her kind loving words and gentle sympathy, and never never-denying more substantial aid.

"I am staying not five minutes walk from you," she said, addressing the children, "do you think you might be allowed to spend to-morrow with me?"

They looked helplessly at Mary, and she in her turn glanced hopelessly at the shabby mourning.

"We shall be quite alone," said Miss Mordaunt addressing the elder sister. "I hardly like to ask you to come with them, perhaps Mr. Sinclar could not spare you."

"Do not let me keep you at home Mary," said her father. "You know I told you just now that I must go to Liverpool to-morrow.

Miss Mordaunt saw the expression of utter misery which came over the girls face, as she said in a under tone, "Oh, father, must you go?"

"Go? of course I must, why should you seek to prevent me?"

So Mary gratefully accepted the invitation for *herself* and her brother and sister, and the next day

was the first of many spent with Gertrude Mordaunt.

"Is Papa at home," was the first question Mary asked of the landlady, as having resisted all their kind hostess' entreaties to stay later, she and the children reached home about seven o'clock, her father having faithfully promised that he would be back by that hour.

"No, Miss, and he can't be here now before 11.30, you'd best to go to bed at ten o'clock, and let me sit up for him."

"No, thank you, Mrs. Drew, it is very kind of you, but I had rather sit up."

Strange thoughts were in the young girl's mind as she kept her lonely watch that night.

There had been a new light shining upon her young life that day, a strange new interest drawing her on from old associations, to a world brighter and happier than she had yet dreamed of.

It was not alone the refinement of Gertrude Mordaunt's home, nor the peculiar charm of her manner which had revealed to Mary Sinclair this new feeling of her being Perhaps the girl could not have told you what it was that had come to her, and changed the whole aspect of her otherwise joyless life; but I am an old man, privileged to take a peep behind the scenes, and I will tell you the truth at once

For one short half hour on that day, Basil Mordaunt had ridden over from some place in the neighbourhood where he was staying, to see his sister.

He had taken very little apparent notice of the girl, but she had watched his tender manliness of manner towards his sister, she had seen how that sister (herself Mary's ideal of perfection), although five years his senior, appealed to his judgment and deferred to his opinions, and somehow there had stolen into her heart a thought of what life would be, with such an one as Mr. Mordaunt to rule and guide her—not as husband, gentle reader, pray don't put such a thought as this down to my heroine; for they say, young ladies ought never to think of such things until they are asked. I never could quite understand this myself, for it seems to imply that the love comes directly the man asks you to become his wife, but I confess that I don't know much about such things, and I shall only get into a hobble if I attempt a dissertation upon propriety, so I had better leave it to the mothers of the 19th century, only remarking that these ladies always appear to me to have very different and *convenient* ideas upon "*les convenances.*"

So I really must beg you to understand that it was not as a husband, but as a friend, a counsellor, perhaps a brother, that Mary Sinclair thought how

pleasant it would be to *own* Basil Mordaunt.

I too had sat up that night poring over fusty law papers, and at about twelve o'clock I heard an uneven footstep coming up the street, and a harsh, discordant voice singing some low song, broke upon my ear—I saw Mr. Sinclair reel up the little path in front of No. 4; Mary opened the door to him.

He greeted her with an oath, she answered him very gently, all I heard was the word "Mother."

Somehow it seemed to quiet him, for he went upstairs, and soon all was silent.

Only a light burned in Mary's attic window, and I have since heard how she knelt that night, (which was but the prelude to so many more of shame and of misery) and swore, that in weal or woe, in richness or sorrow, in honour or dishonour, for the sake of the loving gentle spirit, who she hoped might even now be hovering near her, she would be a faithful daughter to her erring father.

CHAPTER III

MONTHS passed on. John Sinclair had obtained some subordinate situation in the Union Bank of Barton on the Lea. No one knew how he managed to retain his post there, for it was an established fact that he was drunk every night, aud yet he appeared behind his desk in the morning, as active and intelligent as his situation required of him.

Mary's life was brightened by occasional visits to Gertrude Mordaunt. Sometimes Basil was there, never by look or word evincing the deep interest he had taken in his sister's friend, since that first day, when he had seen her in her sorrow, and her shabby mourning.

Gertrude had guessed his secret, but even to her, Basil was strangely reserved on all such subjects, so she let things take their course, and as usual *trusted.* Poor Mary's face was often anxious and clouded over now, for somehow hope had gone out of her heart, and the days that were to come looked strangely dreary.

She sat in the window at her work one bright

June evening, catching the last gleam of light, and listening to the joyous shouts of children at their play, as their glad, ringing laugther broke through the calm summer air.

Edith and Hugh were amongst them, and Mary smiled one of her own unselfish smiles, as she thought that her young brother and sister were happy; ignorant as yet of the cares which she felt were dragging her down, and which it was the one study of her life to avert from them.

It grew too dark for work, and she thought it would be a pleasant surprise to Edith and Hugh if she went to meet them, it was of no use to wait for father, probably he would not be in for hours to come. Mary guessed but too well where he was to be found that night.

The door opened, and Mrs. Drew announced the name of Mordaunt.

Mary sprang forward, "Oh, how very kind," she said, and then stopped, for the hand that grasped hers was not Gertrude's gentle clasp, and the voice was every bit as sweet as Miss Mordaunt's, but very low and manly.

"Oh, Mr. Mordaunt, I beg your pardon. I thought it was your sister. I will ring for candles."

"No," answered Basil, "please don't do that,

think what I have to say, can be said just as well in the dark, perhaps better."

He made her sit down in the chair she had reached, and he placed another near it for himself.

What could he mean? Mary was almost afraid of what that grave, clever man might be going to say to her, but she saw that the clearly cut intellectual face looked less grave than usual, and the strong, determined mouth wore a strange half amused expression, as Basil caught sight of the timid trusting young face which was raised to his.

"Mary," he said, "I am going away, I had a letter this morning offering me an appointment at Constantinople, which would be wrong of me to refuse, for I am but a poor man; Gertrude is the heiress, she would help me of course, dear old girl, but I will not be helped, as long as I have a head and hands wherewith to work. I am to leave England in a month. I am come to you to-night to ask you if I am to go to my labour alone?"

She did not understand him at first, but the grey eyes were fixed upon her now, with such depth and earnestness in them that somehow the knowledge of what he meant, came to her before he spoke again.

"My darling, I love you; will you be my wife?"

He read her answer in the blushing averted cheek,

in the clinging grasp of the little hand as it lay in his broad palm, and yet he felt at once that for some reason, it was not to be all as he wished.

There was one instant's pause, one moment's irresolution, on the one hand were love such as in her wildest dreams she had never imagined could be bestowed upon her, competence, if not affluence, Gertrude, her sister. And Basil's strong arm was round her, and she had to speak the word which would make it her shield for ever.

On the other hand were the home worries standing in ghastly array before her, the poverty which was but a light burden compared to her father's habitual intemperance, the daily cares and anxieties about the children. Then more distinctly and clearly than the prospect of future brightness, or the remembrance of present trials, stood out the memory of that day only six months before, when she had vowed so solemnly never to desert her father and the children. There was no heroism in the tone in which the poor child answered, no seeking to hide the bitter grief which the sacrifice cost her, as she spoke in a voice choking with sobs.

"Do not ask it, it must not be, I cannot, dare not leave them".

Then in broken accents she told him of her vow, she touched upon her father's crying sin, of the life

of wretchedness, it might be of wickedness, which might be the portion of her young brother and sister if they were left uncared for now.

She did not see the pained expression upon Basil's haughty face, as she spoke of her father, had she done so perhaps she would never have given in to the request which he now made, for it would have shown her that none who bore the smallest shade of disgrace upon their name, could have aught in common with Basil Mordaunt.

Truth to tell he would have spoken months before if it had not been for his knowledge of Mr. Sinclair's *failing*—he had brought himself to call it this, only on that day, and taking this mild view of the subject, had made up his mind to lose no time in ascertaining his fate.

He was most honestly in love. For the first time in his life Basil felt that even pride must be sacrificed, to win his treasure.

He heard his sentence in silence, with his head bowed upon his hands. He had high, stern notions of duty and self-sacrifice, and he could not but confess that Mary was acting rightly.

At last he spoke. "My darling, it must be as you say, but in three years surely Edith will be old enough to take charge of your father and of Hugh. *I shall* be able to get some appointment at home

then, and they must come and live near us. Mary, my own, will you be mine then?"

Even then she hesitated, but Basil broke down every obstacle, and smoothed away every difficulty, and at last she said that her father might be spoken to. Then hope and happiness came to her as Basil talked of all he should do during his absence.

He was sitting there still, holding her hand in his, when a heavy footstep was heard without. A deep blush of shame rose to Mary's cheek, but she was spared the bitter humiliation of seeing her father degraded before the man she loved. Mr. Sinclair was flushed and excited, but perfectly sober.

Mary slipped out of the room, and then Basil told of his love and hopes.

Mr. Sinclair was delighted; he even hinted that there was no necessity for delay, but Basil mindful of his word, negatived the possibility of their marriage before the three years had elapsed.

Then the two men, who had so little in common, talked on the one subject on which they fully agreed —Mary's perfections.

"She has been a good daughter to me, Mr. Mordaunt," said John Sinclair, as he grasped Basil's hand; "you will give her a happy home, will you not?"

"If my efforts and my love can make her happy,

she shall never know one moment's sorrow," answered Mordaunt fervently, and then he said, "Good night," and went to seek Mary.

For a long time John Sinclair sat alone, thinking (while he still had power to think) of the future which lay before him. It looked dark and dreary enough, although this prospect of future happiness for Mary was some relief to him; for in his heart, although he bullied and tormented her, this child of his was dearer to him than all else in the world.

So he thought long and earnestly, and the memory of his dead wife, and the sweet faces of his living children seemed to rise before him, and seek to keep him back from the great evil he was meditating.

The struggle was over at last.

In the same room where one short hour before, the young girl had sacrificed all present happiness for the sake of him and of his children, the strong man yielded to temptation and fell. He had fallen many times before in his life, but this was the heaviest fall of all, the one step which could never be retraced, which even if repented of, could never be in any way atoned for.

He rose at last from his seat and unbolted the door, which he had carefully closed after Basil, and any one but his own children must have detected the traces of fear and guilt on the man's pale

haggard face. Perhaps they were too much occupied with their own thoughts to give much heed to him that night. There was a sweet peaceful expression upon Mary's face, a more tender look than ever in the soft brown eyes, and Edith and Hugh appeared violently excited, for they had seen the parting at the garden gate, and drawn their own conclusions therefrom.

"I am so glad, dear," said Edith lovingly. "I like him so much, and I think he is so handsome."

"Mary, I twig," said Hugh. "How jolly it will be to have such a brother-in-law," and his rough boyish kiss was warmer than usual.

All too quickly the days flew by, the brightest and happiest that Mary Sinclair had ever known,—all too surely came that last evening, when she and Basil must part for three long years.

They walked together in the summer twilight in the old woods which surrounded Barton on the Lea; they talked of the months which had passed—of the years which were to come—and then the parting came—the long passionate embrace—the whispered words of hope and love which each felt would be their comfort through the weary separation. The kindly, pitying moon shone on them as they stood there, the bright stars shed their soft light upon the

girl's bent head and the man's erect muscular form.

There were no other witnesses of that farewell.

Then Basil Mordaunt in his strength and his power went his way into the world of men, and Mary Sinclair returned to the old life in her father's home.

CHAPTER IV.

"FATHER, in pity tell me what is on your mind. Do let me help you."

Six months passed away, it was the last night of the old year, and the father and daughter sat alone, perhaps impelled by some strange fascination to wait for the dawn of the New Year which was to bring such changes to them both.

It came at last, the deep bell of the old Parish Church tolled out the year which now was dead for ever—its joys and its sorrows never again to be enacted.

Then the glad chimes rang out, telling that a new period of existence had begun, that there might be hope in the future for some of the watchers who sat up that night; but somehow to Mr. Sinclair and Mary the music of the joyous bells told a sadder tale than the solemn knell had done.

Poor Mary's burden seemed to be growing heavier each day.

Some unaccountable change had come over her father during those last few months. He very seldom drank now, but he was always gloomy and morose; he seemed to be living in constant dread of some-

thing, but what that something was no one knew.

Gertrude Mordaunt had left Barton on the Lea, and gone to her home in the south, I had returned to my London chambers, the good old Vicar, who had been a true friend to Mary, had gone to give account of his faithful stewardship, and the poor girl must have indeed been lonely during that dreary winter. There were only those precious letters from Constantinople to cheer her through it all, to give her strength for the present in the prospect of the bright future which Basil was never tired of painting.

Mr. Sinclair gazed at his child earnestly as she repeated the question, "Father how can I help you?"

He rose from his seat, and went to where she sat; then he rested his hand upon the dark hair, and smoothed it lovingly, and the misery and remorse of months were concentrated in the man's face as he answered.

"Go to bed, child; you'll know what it is soon enough. Before the year is very old, it will come to you, and the little love that's left for your poor old father will all go; but never mind child, never mind."

Then the momentary softness vanished, and a hard stern look came into Mr. Sinclair's face as with a fearful oath he ordered Mary from the room.

She knew him too well to attempt disobedience, so she went to her room, and through the long hours of the night she heard the low groans of agony which told her that a load of no common guilt must be on her father's mind.

Another weary fortnight passed on, and one morning Hugh, kept a close prisoner by a bad cold, was amusing himself looking out of the window, and was glad to find that Barton on the Lea was more alive than usual.

"I say," he said to his sisters, "there's something up. Mr. Oldchurch is strutting up and down the street, looking more important than ever, and Mr. Wortham looks as if he had been shot, and —— But Hugh's impatience could no longer be restrained; he gazed stealthily round the room to see if he could possibly escape without being seen by Mary, and finding the impossibility of making his egress, he quietly opened the window, and held a conversation with a schoolfellow who was walking down the street. "I say, Buchanan; what's up"?

But Buchanan was evidently not inclined to be friendly, and answered doggedly, "There's been a robbery discovered at the Bank, and two fellows have been taken on suspicion."

"Oh!" said Hugh, "is that all?" and he shut the window very much more noisily than he had

opened it, and thereby attracted Mary's attention.

"You naughty boy, how can you expect ever to get well?"

"Well, don't excite yourself; I only wanted to ask Buchanan, what all the row was about. I thought there had been a fight, or some more poaching, and after all it's only a row at the Bank."

"The Bank, what about the Bank?" and Mary's cheek was deadly pale, and her grasp of her brother's arm was convulsive in its energy.

"Come, Mary, let a fellow go; there's nothing the matter, only there's been a robbery discovered there."

"Father, father," said the poor girl.

"Why, Mary, is our money there," asked Edith; "will it make us very poor?"

"No, answered Mary dreamily. "We have no money there." Then she went into her own room, and waited until she heard what she knew must come. For it was all clear to her now; of course there would be more to hear by-and-bye, but never would she realize more than she did during that lonely hour, that some how or other her father was connected with this calamity.

For a long time she thought only of him, of the agony he must have suffered, of the still greater disgrace to come; then to add to the load of misery

same words which seemed spoken in mockery at her side, words which Basil had uttered on one of those bright summer evenings which now seemed so very far off.

They had been talking of poverty, and she had been wondering, how amongst the rich ones of this earth, he, clever, handsome, flattered as he was, could have chosen any one as poor and humble as herself.

He had spoken some low loving words, telling her that she was a treasure beyond all price, and then he had said,

"There is only one thing I could not do, I could not marry any one, whose name had any taint or suspicion of crime upon it. I knew a man once, who was madly in love with a girl, her father was suspected of being connected with some attempt at fraud; he had interest, and managed to get off by some quibble of the law, but he never could show his face amongst honest men again. Wigram (that was my friend's name) *would* marry the girl, and in the end she was untrue to him, and in addition to her infidelity she robbed him. For this reason, I never could marry any one whose father had been guilty of such a crime as that. I should always be thinking that the taint was hereditary, that my wife *could* not be faithful and true."

Now those lightly spoken words came back to poor Mary with fearful distinctness. She felt that her doom was sealed.

You must remember this girl had been brought up in a strange school: she had never believed in her father. She had been taught rather to look out for evils, and to try and avert them. She could not avert what was coming on her now, she could not walk out into the streets of Barton on the Lea and ask for particulars, she dared not go to the Bank.

No; there are some cases in which suspense is better than certainty, in which the clinging to a doubt is preferable to seeking one's own doom.

It came soon enough; Mary started at a timid knock at the door, and almost smiled at her own absurdity as Edith's gentle voice said, "Will you come to dinner, dear?"

"Is father at home?"

"No, but Mrs. Drew says we had better not wait."

So those three sat down to dinner, and perhaps, truth to tell, the two younger ones rather enjoyed the meal, without the usual restraint of their father's presence; poor Mary smiled mechanically, and tried to eat.

"You are wanted, Miss, if you please," said Mrs. Drew, with a world of sympathy in her voice, "it's Mr. Oldchurch from the Bank. I've asked him in-

to my parlour Miss, if you'll please to go there."

Mr. Oldchurch had never seen his clerk's daughter before. He was a good, worthy man, but not a gentleman. Somehow the girl's quiet dignified manner put out of his head what he had intended to say. Perhaps he had meant to be stern, perhaps he had thought that the sins of the father ought to be visited on the children, and he had heard nothing of the girl, which might have made him merciful, and all he knew of the father inclined him to be very obdurate.

Mary stood before him in mingled fear and shame, but withal there was a certain heroism about her which touched the man's honest heart.

The rough hand was laid on her shoulder.

"My poor child, I bring you bad news."

"I know it," she said, and she shrunk from his touch; not in anger. God knows but instinctively she recoiled from the bearer of such sad disgrace.

"*You* know it! how? the woman told me you knew nothing: Surely"—and he turned aside and said to himself, "surely this girl cannot have been a party to the fraud." Then again he looked at the young innocent face, at the truth and honesty shining in every feature, and even more than the former softness was in his voice as he said,

"What do you know, my dear?"

She was humble now, what right had *she* to be proud?

"Oh" she cried, "I know nothing really, but that some great misery is hanging over us. Tell me what it is,—I think I can bear it."

"My dear, we know nothing certain, but there has been a robbery at the bank, foul play somewhere, a cheque for £400 was drawn upon London some months ago purporting to be drawn by me, and apparently bearing my signature; the writing was a forgery. There are two people upon whom suspicion rests, one is John Franklin, the other is——." A sob choked the old man's utterance.

Strangely white, and still, was the girl's face as she finished the sentence for him, "my father you would say, where is he that I may go to him?"

"My dear, he and Franklin have been before the magistrates this morning, and have been committed for trial at the next assizes. They were taken to Wilford an hour ago. His one wish was to see you. My carriage is at the door; will you come with me now? And, my dear, although I said there had been foul play, no one knows who the guilty party is. Every man is innocent until he is proved to be guilty, now go and get ready, and keep up your courage."

"What is it Mary?" asked Hugh and Edith as they saw their sister's pale face, "is father ill?"

"No darlings, but he cannot come home, and I am going to see him, for my sake and for mother's," (here the girl's voice sank into an awed whisper) "Will you keep quite quiet until I come home?"

They had never yet refused a request of hers, so they went back again into the dull room, and there they sat through the weary hours of that winter's afternoon.

Very tenderly did Mr. Oldchurch deal with the friendless girl, very kindly he spoke to her when he spoke at all, but instinctively he felt that she liked silence best, so in their four miles drive very few words were exchanged between them.

At last the carriage stopped in front of an old ivy covered building, standing on a gentle slope, overlooking a valley, so lovely that it might indeed have been called the valley of peace; but the iron bars across the windows showed that in that dwelling peace *was* not, but that men burdened with the weight of sin looked down from those caged casements upon the quiet scene below.

Mary cast a timid glance upwards.

"Will they let me in?" she said.

"Yes, there will be no difficulty about that; the governor is a personal friend of mine."

The nailed doors opened as if by magic, and then closed with a ponderous unearthly sound, and for

the first time in her life Mary stood within the walls of a prison, and the prisoner she was there to see was her own father.

A few minutes more, and she stood in his presence alone.

"I told you you would know all soon, Mary," said the wretched man; "do you remember, child, when the bells rang in the new year so merrily?"

"Oh, father, father, say you are not guilty?"

He only bowed his head, and a strange look of determination came over his face; still the girl went on, entreating him to speak, telling him that for her dead mother's sake she would love him and cling to him through everything.

"Mary, don't ask me now," he said at last; "the truth will soon be known."

"Oh, father, it will be a long time to the assizes."

"It will be known before the assizes, child." And with this she was obliged to be satisfied.

"Mary," said Mr. Sinclair, after a pause, "I am glad you have an honest man's love. Mordaunt will cling to you whatever happens, and you'll look after the little ones; not for my sake, I don't deserve it of you, but for hers who is now an angel in heaven."

A knock at the door of the cell warned Mary that her visit must be brought to a close. She once more

threw her arms round the erring man, and then she felt herself gently drawn away. She did not know what happened after that, but at last she was sitting in the carriage, Mr. Oldworth bending over her anxiously.

"You feel better now, my dear; you were a little queerish at first, and no wonder, poor young thing. Ah, here we are at home. Good bye, and God bless you; if my wife or I can do anything for you, let me know. I'm sorry enough to have been partly the means of bringing this trouble upon you, but it's not my fault, you understand."

For all answer she placed her hand in his, and looked up into his face with an expression which sought to tell all her gratitude for his kindness, and the rough unpolished man understood it, and was satisfied.

Edith and Hugh knew all; a chattering neighbour had been in, and tried to improve the occasion; and Mary found the two poor things cowering over the fire, fearing they knew not what. She did not try to comfort them; she had no power to do so, for all hope had gone out of her heart.

So they sat together nestling close to each other, those three who had no one in the world to turn to and the rain pattered against the window, and the wind whistled piteously down the street, and the

world without was as dark and dreary as the world within.

"It's like the day mother died," said Hugh at last, "but somehow its worse now. Why is it, Mary? for we do not love *him* half as much as we loved *her*."

Mary did not answer for an instant; she could not tell the boy that there are some sorrows in the world harder to bear even than the loss of our loved ones; then she said: "Darling, we must think kindly of him to-night, as mother would have had us do, and we must pray for him that the truth will be made clear."

They did pray: in their innocent way those children asked that their father might be spared, and the guilty brought to punishment; and some hours later Mary prayed, too, that the guilty might repent, and find mercy with the most merciful.

But before that prayer was uttered, the great sacrifice of the girl's life had been made.

"Most important news; this evening's paper containing a full account of the robbery and forgery at the bank, and the committal of Sinclair and Franklin."

The nasal twang of the old newsman echoed up and down the dull street, and Mary asked Mrs. Drew *to buy her* a copy of the "Boston Chronicle." More

real than ever was the misery now, when she had heard her father's name branded through the public streets.

She read the details, which she already knew; then she folded up and addressed the newspaper to Basil Mordaunt at Constantinople, and with that fatal paper went a letter, containing these words: "Basil, dearest of all, we must part. I free you from your promise. Doubt and suspicion are resting on my father's name. You will see that the proofs against him are much stronger than those against Franklin. Basil, your own words are in my mind now; you would never believe that I could be faithful and true. You would always be thinking that I should act as that girl acted, whom you so blamed your friend for marrying, with that taint upon her father's name. You would never trust your wife. I *can* bear to part with you. I *could not* bear that. God bless you, and make you happy wherever you are, my own Basil.

"MARY."

CHAPTER V.

A SHORT chapter in a different scene, even in the city of mosques and palaces, the far off Constantinople. You must not expect a description of the place, for how could I give it unless I copied from books, never having been there? Indeed, never having been much out of town, except when gout took me to Barton-on-the-Lea, and so was the cause of my folly in writing this story. However, I believe it is a very grand, luxurious place, and on the particular night of which I am writing, there was a grand ball at the British Embassy, where, as the newspapers say, all the élite and beauty had assembled. Dancing was at its height; there was only one young man in the room who was neither dancing nor flirting, nor talking to some one else, but who leant lightly against one of the marble pillars of the ante-room, gazing with a half weary, half amused smile upon the scene before him. There was a cold expression in the grey eyes which women said were capable of such melting tenderness at times, and there was a stern, hard look about the mouth which *told of* deep thought and untiring work.

A bustle in the ante-room caused him to move from his post. Young men rushed madly to the front, young ladies for some reason or other drew themselves up, and put on an injured air, as Lady and Miss de Lancy were announced. I saw Miss de Lancy once, at one of the London dinners, to which I was occasionally invited, and I am ashamed to confess that at sixty years of age, I felt a great fool on that occasion.

Hers was the most faultless beauty it was ever my lot to gaze upon—bright, ensnaring, captivating; you could not but fall a victim to her charms, and you were kept enslaved until she chose to release you.

She either dismissed or accepted the unfortunate men who literally cringed to her for the honour of a dance, and then she passed on to where our hero stood. She had made a cruel bet that night, "that she would make him her slave;" so she smiled her sweetest smile, and spoke in her softest accents.

"Grave and stern as usual, Mr. Mordaunt. Confess, you think very badly of us for all our worldliness. Do you consider dancing wrong?"

"By no means, for those who like it. To prove it, may I have the honour of a quadrille? I am too bad a dancer to ask for anything else."

"Volontiers! the next, if you will;" and she passed on.

"He is mine," was Miss de Lancy's inward comment, as she caught Basil Mordaunt's eye fixed upon her during the whole of the valse that followed.

They danced the next quadrille together, and two or three more besides, and before the party broke up, Basil had spoken words he bitterly repented of, ere he went to his bed that night.

He was in no way bound to Clara de Lancy, but he could not hide from himself that he had been faithless to Mary—little, loving, gentle Mary, who was so true to him. Miss de Lancy's manner was not to be mistaken; he had but to ask and to be accepted; to win the hand which was the envy of all the men in Constantinople. He put away the idea as unworthy of himself, and resolved that the next day he would write Mary the longest, most loving letter he had ever yet written her. And you must do him this amount of justice; he would have done it, and would have shunned Clara de Lancy from that day, for his love was stronger than his ambition, although not stronger than the pride of a good name, which had been the Mordaunt's inheritance for generations. The next morning brought him a newspaper and a letter; you know the contents of both. I wish to dwell as shortly as I can upon Basil's answer to those heart-broken lines.

"*Mary,* dearest, I must love you always, but you

have judged me rightly; it may be some peculiarity of my nature, but doubt *would* come to me, which no power of mine could chase away. You know how I feel for you, my own Mary; how if I could get away now I would fly to you; how nothing but this insuperable barrier of a doubt upon the name you bear, should ever have come between us; as it is, we must be friends always, but nothing more.

"Ever your faithful,

"BASIL."

For another month no one saw Basil Mordaunt; six weeks more passed, and his engagement to Clara de Lancy was formally announced.

CHAPTER VI.

"I NEVER was ashamed of him before. I am now. All through his life I have been so proud of him. I don't care to own him now."

It was the quiet, gentle Gertrude Mordaunt who spoke, as she tossed her brother's letter to Mary indignantly aside.

"Gertrude, dearest Gertrude, please do not blame him; believe me, it is right and best as it is. I was not good enough for him; he will find some one else more worthy of him."

"Never," answered Gertrude, as she drew the girl more closely to her, and spoke to her such loving, gentle words, as she had not heard during all her misery.

Gertrude had gone to those poor things in their sorrow as soon as she had heard of it; the Mordaunt pride, in which Basil gloried, found no place in that gentle, womanly breast.

A note was brought in to Miss Mordaunt, and there was a grave troubled expression on her face as she read it.

"My child," she said, as Mary looked at her anxiously, "it is from Dr. Thorpe. Your father is ill, and has expressed a wish to see you all."

"Gertrude, tell me, is he dying? Can that be what he meant when he said the truth would be known before the assizes?"

"My darling, you must have faith and trust; think only that he wants to see you; and you must be calm." No need to tell the doctor's words, that the prisoner had not many hours to live.

The long drive was at an end, and then stood before the prison door the forger's motherless children.

Another minute and they were ushered in—not into the cell where Mary had seen him before, but into the governor's house, whither, at the doctor's orders, he had been removed that morning.

There he lay, white as the sheet which covered him, all the coarseness gone from his face, looking more like a picture which the children had seen, and which their mother said was very like him, when she married him.

Mary started at the sight of the death livid face, and spoke to the nurse.

"We should have been sent for before," she said.

"The change only came on this morning, miss;

he's been weak and ailing for some time, but we never thought it was to end like this."

"To end like this!"

Then it really was true, and he was dying; and Mary drew the children nearer to the bed, and stooped to kiss the cold brow.

"My dears," said the dying man, "I've not much time now, and I must speak. You know, Mary, I told you the truth would come out, although I had not the courage to tell it you then. I knew I had not life enough left in me to last until the assizes. I've seen the parson, and he's taken everything down in writing, and by this time I hope poor young John Franklin is in his old mother's cottage; for *I* took the money, and *I* forged the name. Its hard for me to have it to say to you, my children. Don't remember it too hardly against me in the years to come. It *was* theft and forgery. I don't seek to say it was not; but I swear before God that I thought I should have received the money for the old land at the Cape, and I should have paid it all back. Hugh, it was drink made me what I am, brought me to this prison, for it made me wasteful and extravagant, and then I got into debt, and saw no way out of it. Mary, it was the night Mordaunt first spoke to you that I made up my mind to the awful sin. I had been threatened with arrest, and I

was desperate. The parson says the thief on the cross was forgiven, and perhaps through God's mercy I may see your mother again in paradise. I cannot see you clearly now; surely its getting very dark, but it looks somehow as if there would be light in the distance. Kiss me, and tell me you forgive me for all the disgrace I have brought upon your name."

The sobbing children did as he desired, and then they were led from the room, and Gertrude Mordaunt came in and sat with Mary until the deepening shadows fell upon the room, and the waning light flickered on the dying man's face.

Neither of those three spoke until John Sinclair raised himself from his pillow, joined his thin hands together, and said "Jesu, mercy!" Then he died.

God is more merciful than man; and who shall say that the long-delayed repentance was not accepted by Him, who, when He came into His kingdom, remembered the penitent thief.

They buried him next his wife, under the shadow of the wall in the old churchyard, and a simple stone cross marks his grave, which bears only the words, "Jesu, mercy!"

A few weeks later Mary Sinclair, with her young brother and sister, were Gertrude Mordaunt's guests, in her sunny home in the Isle of Wight.

I had seen them for a day as they passed through town on their way to the South, and I was painfully struck with the change in my favourite, Mary. I read that the blow which had fallen upon her would leave its traces through the rest of her life.

The same thought was in Gertrude's mind, as Mary sat at her feet in the lengthening spring evening, with the light of some new resolve on her face. Gertrude was the first to break the silence: "Then, dearest, it is settled; Hugh shall go to school, and Edith shall be our child at home. You must not refuse it, Mary. Let me make some reparation for all he has made you suffer;" and the sister's eye instinctively fell upon the newspaper which had arrived an hour before, and contained the announcement of Basil's marriage.

"Gertrude," answered Mary, gently, "if he is only happy, I think I shall be thankful. If you should see him again, let him know this, and then let him forget me. And now let me thank you for all your love and kindness; you alone have made my life bright; the memory of all you have done, and all you will be doing still, will cheer me in my loneliness; for, Gertrude, dearest, we must part. I

must redeem our honour as far as I can; no one must suffer for *his* crime. It shall be as you wish about Edith and Hugh, and may God bless you for your care of them; but *I* must earn enough to repay what—what he took; and then you will let me come to you for rest; to stay with you now would not be happiness, for I should not be fulfilling the duty which seems marked out for me. Gertrude, my own true friend, do not seek to keep me from what is right; rather bid me God speed, and cheer me on my way."

Gertrude saw that it would be cruel to oppose the girl's fixed resolve, and perhaps, after all, work would be the best thing for her; so it was settled as Mary wished.

A few more weeks elapsed, and she had found a situation as a governess in North Wales.

It was a weary life at first, full of difficulties and disappointments, but the brave, strong spirit overcame all, and the sacred duty was fulfilled.

Five years after her father's death, Mary Sinclair once more stood upon the platform of the station of Barton on the Lea. Leaving her luggage there, she walked quickly on to the churchyard, to kneel by those two graves, and there give thanks for the

mercy which had enabled her to carry out her purpose. Then she walked quickly on, and stood in Mr. Oldchurch's office at the bank.

"Bless my soul, my dear," said the worthy man, when his visitor had made herself known; "what can have brought you here? Not that I'm not delighted to see you, of course."

"I came to bring you this, sir," and she put an envelope containing four hundred pounds into his hands.

"My dear, I don't want it. How did you come by it?"

"Honestly, sir," answered Mary, a flush of shame rising to her cheek, for she felt that her father's daughter had a right to be doubted; "two hundred pounds were sent me from the Cape, the price of our land there; the other two hundred I have earned. I went out as a governess. I could not get it sooner, for you see I did not know very much, and my salary was not very high."

Mr. Oldchurch threw his arms round Mary, and gave her a hearty kiss.

She smiled the brightest smile that had been upon her face for many a long day, as she refused to take the money which the old man pressed upon her.

"It has made me happy to bring it to you, sir. You must not refuse to take it, for indeed it is owed

you." Then the girl went on her way, home to Gertrude and Edith, and the rest she had so longed for, and had earned at last.

"Mary," said Gertrude, on the first evening of the girl's return, "I had a letter from Basil to-day; he is coming home."

Something of the old bright colour rose to Mary's usually pale cheek, as she answered, "Coming home! Then, Gertrude, dearest, I must leave you. Don't think badly of me for saying it, but even now, after all these years, I would not meet him. I thought I had found peace at last; I cannot lose it again."

Very tenderly, as in the old days at Barton on the Lea, Gertrude drew the weary head closer to her. "My darling, he is very ill; he says he is coming home to die; to bring me his child, and then to go from us again. He has never spoken of his wife since the day he wrote to tell me of her death, but I have heard from others that her light, frivolous conduct nearly broke my poor Basil's heart; that all the old pride has left him. Mary, will you not stay and see him, and lighten his heavy burden by telling him *you* forgive him?"

So Mary stayed, and Basil came home, as he had said, "to die."

They watched him lovingly and tenderly, those two women, whose idol he had been—whose idol he became again in those last days of his life.

There was no word of reproach spoken, no allusion to the past, which now could never be undone. He was too weak to bear much talking; he liked to lie under the shade of a noble oak, within sight of the bright blue sea, and to watch his sister and Mary as they chased his lovely little daughter across the lawn, or twined garlands of flowers in her golden hair; but, most of all, he liked to listen to the sound of Mary's voice, as she read to him in the soft gentle tones he had never ceased to remember.

He never once alluded to his dead wife, only on one occasion when some Constantinople friend called, and thoughtlessly remarked upon Ida's striking resemblance to her mother, a strange expression of pain came over the father's face.

Mary sat by him in the twilight one August evening. He had been weaker than usual all day, but he said he was very happy, that peace had come to him at last.

"Mary, my own," he said, in his old loving way, "have you forgiven me for all I made you suffer?"

"Quite, entirely, as if it had never been; I feel to-night as though all were a dream, and we were walking in the old woods again."

"Kiss me, darling," he said. She leant over him, and kissed him for the first and last time since they had parted, six years before.

"Thanks, dearest; you will come to me soon; and you will teach my child to be, what *you* have been—faithful and true."

The words came to her with a strange power of comfort in them; he did not doubt her now; he left her the care of his child.

She thought he slept, and sat on, fearful of disturbing him. The last gleam of light faded behind the distant hills: Gertrude came into the room, and saw how it was: the light of another life had begun for Basil Mordaunt.

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